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ABSTRACT

Over 200 participants from 10 states and 17 universities attended "The First National Symposium on Chicano Literature and Critical Analysis." Five of the papers presented at the symposium are given in this publication. The papers cover Chicano poetry, novel, drama, and popular folklore humor. "National Character vs Universality in Chicano Poetry" sets forth the notion that national traditions are adaptations of universal styles and national character is or should be but a step toward universality. The new "space" (identity) of Chicano art or literature is related to the definition of the Chicano national character in "The Space of Chicano Literature." In "La Prosa Chicano: Tres Epigones de la Novela Mexicana de la Revolucion", three novels are reviewed--Tomas Rivera's "Y no se lo trago la tierra", Polanco P. Hinojosa-S.' "Estampas del valle y otras obras", and Miguel Mander-M.'s "Peregrinos de Aztlan." Humor as a tool of artistic expression is the topic of "Chicano Folklore: Paza Humor in Texas." Although the title indicates a Texas context, many of the situations and expressions are part of the national Chicano experience. "Satire: Techniques and Devices in Luis Valdez' 'Las Dos Caras del Patroncito'" traces the exchange of roles between the oppressor and the oppressed. (Author/NQ)

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The First National Symposium on
Chicano Literature and Critical Analysis

Presents

THE CHICANO LITERARY WORLD 1974

Compiled by

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THE FIRST NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON CHICANO
LITERATURE AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS: AN OVERVIEW

The generation of a new awareness relative to the Chicano and his world has produced and is producing an increasing number of literary works. This is significant because the literary area articulates many of the socio-philosophic thrusts which form the foundation of a culture and a people. The First National Symposium on Chicano Literature and Critical Analysis represents an attempt to organize and consolidate the interpretation of those perspectives. Its scope was national as over two hundred participants from ten states and seventeen universities came to exchange ideas. Some of the papers presented at the event form part of the present volume.

The symposium comes at a time when the Chicano appears on the threshold of a new level in the development of a collective consciousness. Much has been said about the Chicano drawing on his rich Indo-Hispanic heritage as a means of constructing a solid base for our contemporary culture. Yet in assuming this past heritage, we also assume its history which traces the movement from a Golden Age Spain and an Aztec serpent at the height of their power; to the fall of both as they become fragmented and left behind by time. The regeneration process must transcend this historical condition. Current

manifestations of a strong literature do much to evidence a new period of vitality for a people long on the dark side of history. The presence of a valid body of Chicano literary criticism confirms it.

The present articles by Sylvia Gonzales, Juan Bruce-Novoa, Guillermo Rojas, José Reyna and Nasario Garca are part of the collection prepared for the symposium. The specific areas covered by the collection are Chicano poetry, novel, drama and popular folklore humor. Throughout their commentary on the literary production, the critics appear to be acutely aware of a conscious and unconscious effort on the part of the artists to evidence a movement toward a Chicano national identity forged out of an immediate past and present Anglo-American and Mexican dominance. Gonzales sees this effort within the context of a search for universality. Bryce-Novoa depicts it as an ever increasing space between the Anglo and Mexican cultural influences with a unique language hybrid that expresses its reality. Guillermo Rojas becomes more specific as instances are found in the novels of Rivera, Hinojosa and Méndez. José Reyna describes it in humorous situations and phrases. Garca's work turns the focus on the Chicano himself who discovers alien faces in his own behavior.

In her article, "National Character vs. Universality in Chicano Poetry," Gonzales sets forth the notion that national traditions are adaptations of universal styles and national character is or should be but a step toward universality. The process involves a step back into history, the establishment of

national identity and the transcending of national character in search of universal values. She compares this three-step process in the Anglo-American and Chicano literary development. In the first we initially see a step back into British tradition. This is followed by a development of national awareness culminating in the American Revolution. The search for wider meaning does not stop here, but continues toward a universal plane in the person of Edgar Allen Poe.

Similarly, the Chicano artist has initially sought to look into his Mexican past and discovers that although we share a common heritage with Mexico, we are different. The search continues deeper into the Aztec, Toltec and Maya cultures for that common past which, blended with a European present, comes to be Vasconcelos' Raza C6smica, a universal ideal which is the goal of poetic expression.

Like Gonzales, Bruce-Novoa approaches Chicano literature from a universal perspective. He relates, what he calls, the space of art or literature to the definition of the Chicano national character. The Chicano, finding himself squeezed between a Mexican and Anglo-American past and present has begun to push them aside in order to create a new space, a new identity. A manifestation of this expanding space is the founding of a national literature and interlingual mode which incorporates fragments of the traditional languages (Spanish and English) but is uniquely Chicano.

Bruce-Novoa further divides the space of Chicano literary reality into two types: Linear, manifested in language and cyclical, which incorporates the universal aspects of the Chicano perspective.

While Gonzales and Bruce-Novoa use the Mexican theme as a point of departure toward poetic universality, Rojas brings us back to a Mexican/Chicano expression of social reality. He reviews three novels: Tomás Rivera's Y no se lo tragó la tierra (1970), Rolando R. Hinojosa-S' Estampas del valle y otras obras (1973) and Miguel Méndez-M.'s Peregrinos De Aztlán (1974). Rojas finds that they incorporate many characteristics of the novels of the Mexican Revolution, including the defects. Like the Mexican novels these three are characterized by a simple and realistic style, a social message and a lack of unifying plot and theme. A new ingredient added, however, is a bilingual phenomenon characterized by the use of Spanish-English, English-Spanish language mixtures and the Pachuco dialect which depart from Mexican tradition.

The realistic aspects of literature depicted in the novels reviewed by Rojas include humorous passages drawn from the wealth of Chicano popular folklore. Humor as a tool of artistic expression is the subject of José Reynas "Chicano Folklore: Raza Humor in Texas." Although, the title indicates a Texas context, many of the situations and expressions are part of the national Chicano experience. Reyna, like the other critics finds a protagonist awareness of basic differences between the Mexican and Chicano.

Beyond humor is satire and the serious social message which accompanies its use. Nasario García in reviewing "Las dos caras del patroncito," a one-act play by Luis Valdez, traces the exchange of roles between the oppressor and the oppressed. Both the patrón and farmworkers are Chicanos. At issue is the influence of Anglo and Mexican stereotypes on the Chicano mind.

The foundations of a national Chicano literature rest on a need to establish a uniqueness in perspective, cultural reality and language. This is evidenced by a conscious and unconscious artistic effort to transcend that which is Mexican and Anglo-American and arrive at a new sense of national identity and universal value. The serious student of Chicano literature discovers this again and again as artists strive to collectively give structure to a new literature. The First National Symposium on Chicano Literature and Critical Analysis,^{*} in part, has assisted in articulating the character of this effort.

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* Held at New Mexico Highlands University, 21-22 November 1974.

NATIONAL CHARACTER VS. UNIVERSALITY IN CHICANO POETRY

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"The Poet is representative. He stands among partial men for the complete man, and apprises us not of his wealth, but of the common wealth."¹ I have borrowed the words of Emerson in describing the poet's responsibility to society. And with this theme in mind, let us consider national character vs. universality in Chicano poetry.

The imminent Mexican writer and philosopher, Octavio Paz, in discussing national character in poetry, questions its ambiguity. In referring to Mexican poetry, he asks whether Mexican poetry is poetry written by Mexicans or poetry that in some manner reveals the spirit, the reality of the character of Mexico. Paz cites López Velarde as the most representative of Mexican poets, yet comments on how his work is so personal in style that it would be useless to look for similarities in his equals or contemporaries.²

The fact is, that the work of López Velarde bears greater resemblance to that of the Argentine poet Lugones, which in its time, resembled that of Laforgue. The point to be made is that it is not national character but the spirit of an epoch which unites these two poets. Although Paz does not deny national traditions or the temperament of people he claims that styles are universal or, international. National traditions, according to this perspective, become versions and adaptations of universal styles. But most important, a work is a unique creation, a singular vision.

The more perfect a work is, the less visible its traditional style.

So, taking these arguments into consideration, how do we describe universality in poetry. In my own judgement, it is the individual writer's reaction or perception of an experience. I would like to say, in agreement with the words of Emerson, it is the poet's response to the human condition. And, the human condition is universal. The artistry of the poet in responding to society or the human condition is the poet's ability to describe the situation rather than naming it. Or, the poet may describe in many forms and content, her own reaction to the experience. Overwhelming emotionalism or symbolism may be the individual approach at resolving the personal catharsis ignited by one incident or the entire human experience. An example of the personal catharsis is evident in my own poem "Chains".

The chains I feel are very heavy
 They weigh upon my heart
 They rip away at my intestines
 They twist and turn inside
 These chains of interlocking thoughts
 Link upon link with time
 With all its fears and frustrations
 Gentle thoughts and evil temptations
 From where do our actions originate
 If not from the twisted chains
 Liquid flowing through our system
 Saturating the iron of self-procreation
 And then it turns to rust

Red sap oozing from porous flesh
 The infection begins to spread
 Until it attacks the mind
 And thus the mind reacts
 Destruction, destruction everywhere
 The defense of one's self hate...

And thus, the poem continues. The artist is in constant search of himself. This is an universal experience. The poet seeks a style as she would an identity. As one's identity is revealed, the style gradually submerges into the recesses of a singular expression of identity.

My own search for identity bears a remarkable resemblance to Irving's "The Author's Account of Himself" from the Sketch-book.³ Although we must consider the great differences in time and social context during which she searches takes place they do reflect a universal need, a human reaction to a universal condition. It is humankind reacting to their environment. No less can be said of my own fascination with the dream state than that of Edgar Allan Poe or Carl Jung. And the wanderings of the protagonist in my story are no different than those of Herman Hesse's Goldmund, irregardless of the length of stay in the soul-searching state.

But let us return to the argument of whether there is or is not a national character in poetry or literature itself. The most immediate example to use for examining this, may be in the evolution of American literature. For convenience, I will choose the Anglo-American experience because it so adequately typifies the

point to which I am directing myself. The question we must first turn to is whether an individual identity can be either explored or determined where there is confusion as to group identity. Can a person truly engage in his search for individual identity within a social context that is not yet clearly defined? Does not an ambiguous social context provide an ambiguous mechanism for an ambiguous literature? In the grasp for identity and confrontation with ambiguity, the natural recourse is to turn to the immediate past. Generations of Anglo-American writers wrote of their experiences as extensions of a greater British identity. They described their lives in the colonies as reflections of a mother country that was in turn, the promoter of the accounts. Most books written in the early United States were published in England, consumed by the English and provided pride in the English ideal.

With the coming of the Age of Reason and Revolution, the early Anglo-American engaged in an emotional, intellectual and finally physical search for their own identity within the reality of the social and political context in which they lived. The writings took on a national character. They wrote about America and the Americans. There was no symbolism or metaphors to describe the American experience. There was neither time nor tranquility to allow for such a luxury. Franklin and Paine called attention to the need for a national and political identity. Wheatley and Bartram verbally painted the natural setting and unique environs where the group catharsis was taking place.

The catharsis was dramatic and violent. Revolution was the final step in defining a national character. The national character which emerged was the Anglo-American Bay Colonies group identity. Sadly enough, it was defined within the boundaries of its immediate environment. Although seeking social and political independence, it never reached nor allowed for, a totally cultural or philosophical independence to prepare them for the cultural groups that were later to descend upon their shores. Nor did it prepare them for their eventual confrontation with the cultures they so readily ignored while carrying the banner of manifest destiny.

However, this new-found security in identifying a national identity did allow them to explore and even toy with universal philosophies. They borrowed ideas from the Germans, Greeks and even oriental mystics. They recognized early that their first need was for the instruments of culture: the institutions and the equipment for creating and producing books and for training writers to write them and a public to read them. Although this effort was interrupted by the war for independence, peace eventually brought them back to literature as an art. By this time, the Anglo-American identity was deeply rooted within the confines of their cultural and ethnic boundaries. A generation of American writers describing the American character and scene passed before the world and met with congenial applause much as would a travelogue on the peoples and places of the United States. There were also observers like De'Touqueville who studied the Anglo-American from the foreign perspective and commented on their political, cultural and moral values. He readily recognized and predicted the eventual conflict which would be produced by their mono-cultural approach to organizing government, institutions and total social structure.

The universal in literature finally did make its appearance on the American scene in the mid-1800's. It was a voice crying in the wilderness. The voice was suffering and melancholy. It expressed pain, frustration and pessimism. A people had found an identity, however, ethnocentric and egocentric we now may justly view it. They had fought a war, formed a government and social institutions, and were in the midst of another war. They had nurtured at least four generations on the American plan. Enough time, events and social designing had occurred within the Anglo-American experience to allow the individual identity to surface. Any many surfaced in rebellion. They reacted as individuals to social issues as natural to humankind as life and death.

The character or reaction I am now attempting to isolate is that of the universal artist. She must develop an art that is in itself a creation requiring a deliberate craftsmanship that does not appear very often in new cultures. It requires that the artist must finally pause in her living and take a position outside herself and her own thoughts and feelings if she is to extract meaning from experience. In the perspective gained, it is possible for the artist to recast the materials of life into forms of her own devising. In presenting this account of a cultural evolution, I have attempted to illustrate that this stage is reached only when society has become sufficiently stable to relieve the artist of concern for the pressing problems and immediate economic needs of existence.

The first of the American writers to express himself in universal terms, Edgar Allan Poe, was also the greatest criticized. He was considered un-American and an expatriate because he idealized or criticized his nation. He turned from the world

of commerce to that of the imagination in an attempt to express his inner life rather than the life around him. His revolt was his personal and private experience with the America of his own day. Just as it has been my personal prerogative as a poet to discuss my inner feelings as a member of La Raza rather than LA Raza, the criticism of my fellow poets makes me no less Chicana than Edgar Allan Poe an American. The artistic examples of Poe and later Hawthorne, Emerson, Melville and others, is that it is not always necessary nor desirable to label a social deficiency in the poetic medium. Universal art is based on personal reactions and impressions to personal experiences as well as to our position in society through use of the imagination. When the artist stands back from the situation and describes her own feelings, emotions, sadness, frustration and even disgust within both a personal and social context, the events become the human condition. And the human condition is one with which all people can identify. This is especially so as the world becomes smaller and the human condition, particularly within a social, political and economic context, is more commonly shared. In this total experience, labels may detract from and isolate the experience. It is a sacrifice for the individual artists especially in this society where people can become fads, because the rewards are not immediate. As in the case of Poe, an entire generation of French rallied to his art before his own people recognized him as a valid contributor to Anglo-American literature. Whether recognition or reward is the true desire of the artist, is not the question. The artist must be true to her own soul and personal experiences and this message is universal and eternal.

But I have stated my purpose. This entire discussion is to bring the Chicano poet within the realm of the universal artist. The Chicano peoples find themselves in the

unique position of evolving a cultural and group identity within a larger, alien and hostile identity. Withstanding years of cultural oppression and group incoherence, thus a lack of identity, the process requires no less, if not more, than what has been described in the Anglo-American experience. There are many Mexican cultural remnants we can relate to, but are they reliable in our search for an identity within the Anglo-American cultural context? Have they been sufficient enough to provide us with secure definitions of ourselves as a people? If they had, would the very names by which we choose to identify ourselves be so challenged amongst ourselves? Does not the very social context, which has been one of oppression, require adaptations of our Mexican and Indian cultural heritage?

In recognition of our oppression, the Chicano people also searched for identity and awareness as a group, as a nation within a nation. This became the cultural, psychological, philosophical and political nation of Aztlán. As is true with evolving nations and cultures, the artist first attempted to describe the culture, character and physical environs. We read of the barrios, vecindad, pinto; wherever we found Chicanos. We ate beans and tortillas and listened to rancheras or corridos. The descriptions are endless. Ricardo Sánchez tells of El Paso:

Death stalks leisurely
Wearing a broad-brimmed straw hat
El Paso.
Resonator of flapping tortillas
Wobbly with beer and diluted alcohol
In eastside, southside alley ways,
Home of legends...
el largo/consafos 1959 ⁴

And Abelardo protests fiercely:

Stupid america, see that Chicano
 With a big knife
 On his steady hand
 He doesn't want to knife you
 He wants to sit on a bench
 And carve christfigures
 But you won't let him⁵

Omar Salinas identifies himself as the "Aztec Angel"⁶ and Nephtali de Leon takes us back to Tenochtitlán and the original bronze warriors.⁷

Through their poems, the group reaches out in their search for identity. We seek the common threads which run through each and everyone of us within our unique experience. It too, has been a slow, introspective process burdened with pain and indecision. Nevertheless, labels were needed and used in our search for the Chicano reality. Without labels we would have lost the definition.

The first Chicano writers emerged with verses colored with culture. The message did not exclude anger nor recognition of oppression. The immediate environment became the immediate reality. Our senses, stimulated by the environment, sought the immediate past for their sensibility. We turned to Mexico and its traditions. We sought out the Mexican philosophers such as Paz and Vasconcelos, the writers, painters such as Rivera and Orozco and musical composers. We incorporated them into our philosophies, our literature, our art, our music, our minds, and finally the minds of our children.

But there was an ironic twist to this Chicano reality. Many of us recognized our Mexican roots as those which we had uprooted to join the fields and factories of the United States. We were, as the Mexicans called us, the Pochos escaping our Mexican

past while our Mexican present rejected us. We searched deeper into our own reality and the bronze color of our skins and soul. The Poet looked to the Aztec, Toltec and Mayan civilizations for guidance. Our literature and music combined the search and the mestizo became the living centre of our reality. We found that the Hindus call the "Chakis", or psychic centre rather than the physiological or physical essence of the Pocho. The anger and frustration merged with our psychic centre within the political context of Anglo-American oppression and we became Chicano.

The poetry that followed was that of oppression and the oppressed. The Chicano became the reality we had been searching. The labels continued, but they took on a new meaning, a new form. We became political; we became nationalistic. We wrote about raza, pride, la causa and revolution. We wrote of the liberation of the mind and spirit where physical liberation meant extinction. Thus, the Chicano poet has fulfilled her duty to human, historical evolution. She has accomplished in a few decades what other groups have spent hundreds of years in developing. The Chicano poet has proven herself more than capable of competing with the best of other civilizations.

So why universality in Chicano poetry? Like the evolution of all literature as reflective of groups, it must grow. If it does not grow, it will become stagnant and lose its meaning just as Chicanos will lose their meaning. The only direction our growth can take us is to become universal because of our reality and significance for the future as Chicanos and as inheritors of a mestizo past.

José Vasconcelos has written that in Hispanoamerica the spiritual and material conditions exist to create a fifth race, to replace the other four which have plotted the history of Iberoamerica. He designates Spain, Mexico, Greece and India as

the four civilizations that have contributed most to the formation of Latin America.⁸ This idea of universality of races opposes the usual nationalist concepts and advocates La Raza Cósmica. Although I support wholeheartedly the concept of La Raza Cósmica, I find contradiction and confusion in his inclusion of Mexico as a contributing civilization. The destiny of the Chicano and all of Latin America lies in the embodiment of our heritage. Mexico is not a contributor but an inheritor of a common past which has produced the archetype of the future person, La Raza Cósmica, which is inherent to all Latin Americans.

The Chilean writer and diplomat, Miguel Serrano, sought out the friendships of Carl Jung and Herman Hesse in searching for his own reality as a South American. Through years of correspondence with the two, he confronted his own identity conflict. The question he posed gets to the heart of La Raza Cósmica. Who is the South American if he is neither Asian nor European?

The prototype of Eastern civilizations is all irrational, leaving solutions to quietude by viewing itself as a part of Mother Nature. They are notoriously weak in rational exposition. They think, for the most part, in parables and images. The Hindus live entirely in symbols. They are penetrated and inter-penetrated by them, but they don't interpret them, nor wish others to interpret them. Because to interpret the symbols would mean destroying them. They use meditation and contemplation in perceiving a thought rather than thinking a thought.

Western civilizations, on the other hand, freed their conscious mind from irrationality and instinctive impulses, but total individuality was lost. Thus, the

conscious personality could always be domesticated because it was separated from the primitive, and as a consequence, western civilization became highly disciplined, organized and rational. Their reality depended on the making and moulding of opinions. Nevertheless, the unconscious personality still exists and occasionally erupts in an uncontrolled fashion. This has made them capable of relapsing into the most shocking barbarisms, and the more successful they have become in science and technology, the more diabolical are the uses to which they have invested their inventions and discoveries.

The Chicano, as well as all Latin Americans, are neither Eastern nor Western, but inheritors of the two. We are inheritors of Western thought from the Spanish and continue to exist within its influence. Yet, we have discovered, reflect and continue to seek out our Indian past, the embodiment of the Eastern mind within the Western world. While studying and incorporating the white man's rational approach to research and technology into our struggle for survival, we continue to explore that part of our heritage which produces the irrational and instinctive. We are a combination of East and West, non-compromising to either. To maintain this balance, we must continue to explore our cultural past. In the myths, legends and symbols of our Indian past we can find that link between science and the soul. It is within our destiny as the *riestizo*, the blending of Eastern and Western civilizations, *La Raza C6smica*, to prevent the ultimate symbol, science, from expressing the old desires of humankind to achieve totality or wholeness by conquering the Universe or exploding the Cosmos.

The East has experienced technology and the results of a purely extroverted civilization. They have exhausted the methods of introversion. Yoga, meditation

and concentration are no longer able to produce results because the Collective Unconscious of the East is no longer in tune with it. Therefore, they have turned towards extroversion and are learning more and more of the rationality of the West.

The West, on the hand, appears to have exhausted the rational method and more insistence on it will produce unhappiness for itself and the rest of humankind. While they are now interested in discovering the values of the soul, they must learn to be illogical for that is the only way to combat the power of the state and personal slavery. This entails the white person standing aside and letting others manage the affairs of the world. The threat in this involves the expansion of the many coloured races of the world. They must withdraw and allow the coloured races to speak in order to preserve a legacy for the future. We, as inheritors of East and West by our historical past, are the prototype of La Raza Cósmica which should finally incorporate all of these coloured races into its universe. That is the reality of our being, our destiny, our physic centre. We need only to look at Serrano's Chile today, to see our mutual heritage and conflict as victims of our Western past and present.

The world awaits the appearance of a disciple capable of propounding the message, interpreting the underlying language of their work, which has already been proscribed. That disciple will have to be a priest, a magician or a poet. Returning to Emerson, the poet has a special function in the order of nature; "he is the sayer, the namer, and represents beauty".⁹ He is important to his age because, "the experience of each new age requires a new confession, and

the world seems always waiting for its poet".¹⁰

In keeping with the theme of this presentation I have written the following poem...

The Poet Messenger

Must the poet live in the past
In the shadows of memories
Creating on the fringes of lost dreams
Idolizing what used to be
Is there no present in our lives
Is the present too burdened with
reality...

Reality is short but it must take place
It spawns the seeds of our creation
Then the pain and suffering again
The joy of a passing moment
All combined in the aftermath
Of an encounter with reality.

Is that the faith of the poet
Never to confront the present
The kind present for a cruel future.
Does one preclude the other
To create the inspirational past.

But there are other creators
Who do not suffer as the poet.
Life has been kind to them.
With the eye of the artist,
They reproduce the present
To languish in its pleasure.

Is that life's judge of creativity
When circumstances become the critics.
Is it the pain and suffering of the poet
Brief encounters with companionship
Idealized into eternal bonds of love.
Is this the true reality of the poet,
Determining greatness from mediocracy.

Notes

¹Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet" found in Norman Foster, Introduction to American Poetry and Prose, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1971), p. 326.

²Octavio Paz, El arco y la lira (Mexico: Fondo de la cultura económica, 1956), p. 95.

³Washington Irving, Sketch Book (London: John Murray, 1820).

⁴Found in Philip O. Ortega, We are Chicanos: An Anthology of Mexican-American Literature (New York: Washington Square Press, 1973), p. 205.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 216.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 163-65.

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 155-62.

⁸José Vasconcelos, La raza cósmica: misión de la raza iberoamericana: Argentina y Brazil (México: Espasa-Calpe Mexicana, S. A., 1966).

⁹Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet" found in Norman Foster, Introduction to American Poetry and Prose (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1971), p. 327.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 328.

THE SPACE OF CHICANO LITERATURE

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0029

No se trata de otra cosa que de
la imposibilidad del Ser para
terminar de manifestarse libre o
independientemente. Su esencia
se encuentra en la realidad y lo
que percibimos de ella son sus
signos, sus reflejos, que muy
pronto desaparecen devorados por
la contingencia.

Juan García Ponce, La apari-
ción de lo invisible, 1968, p. 204.

Así la imagen es un recurso des-
esperado contra el silencio que
nos invade cada vez que intenta-
mos expresar la terrible expe-
riencia de lo que nos rodea y de
nosotros mismos. El poema es
lenguaje en tensión: en extremo
de ser y en ser hasta el extremo.

Octavio Paz, El arco y la

lira, 1967, p. III.

Only from nothing are there in-

finite possibilities -- all si-

multaneously possible. Only in

nothing can you find everything.

Marfa Medina López, 20/X/74

In a comparatively brief period of time, Chicano literature has established itself as a vital reality in the world of contemporary letters. Now it has reached one of those inevitable but dangerous junctures, that of the coming together of Chicano critics, who supposedly know what Chicano literature is and how to study it, for the purpose of discussing the role of the critic and what is the subject matter itself. And like the word Chicano, which has undergone similar onslaughts, our literature is in danger of being defined within limiting characteristics based on narrow criteria. I would like to propose that Chicano, and therefore Chicano literature is nothing, the nothing of which Marfa Medina López speaks. Let me explain that in that sense, nothing is an ultimate good and in no way negative. I hope that the following presentation of my theories of literary space will open a positive, dynamic approach to our literature, instead of the limiting ones that could damage it.

Literary Space

When Occidental man ceases to be what Mircea Eliade calls religious man,¹ with an absolute certainty respecting the order of the universe and his place and

purpose in that order, man finds himself in the chaos of a reality void of any exterior superstructure which might give meaning to his life. Modern man is a discontinuous being defined as such by his personal voyage towards death, moved along by sequential, unilateral time, and by his isolation within spatial relationships that only serve to underscore his particular individuality as this man and no other. In a brilliant essay, "El arte y lo sagrado,"² the Mexican author Juan Garcia Ponce reviews the essence of the ideas of some of our time's most renowned thinkers (Merleau-Ponty, Rilke, Pavese, Blanchot, Bataille) who have pondered the situation and fate of discontinuous man. The first epigraph of my essay summarizes the problem. The contingency of discontinuous reality devours man's reflections and images so quickly that his only perception of them is at best partial, fragmentary, resulting in an even more pernicious revelation of his self image as irrevocably lost and meaningless within that speeding, one way time progression. Man seeks to avail himself of resources with which to combat the menace of chaotic discontinuity.

The first reaction might be to turn to religion, as professor Eliade seems to do; but Georges Bataille has explained in *L'Erotisme*³ that religion, at least the Christian sects, justifies and perpetuates man's discontinuous historicity and spatial solitude by projecting it past death into eternity with promises of life everlasting for the particular individual. Religion may be secure order as Eliade sees it, but its concentration on the individual makes it a discontinuous space, and therefore chaotic in the last analysis.

Childhood is the first space of continuity (temporal and spatial simultaneity, total unity) experienced by man. Childhood is a space of free floating movement

within which the child is the assigner of roles, the transformer of reality, unlimited by the physical or mental barriers adults accept as normal. Childhood ends when the child becomes aware of his limited, discontinuous existence, a realization accompanying the predominance of reason over imagination. To return to childhood is impossible within sequential time, but the memory lingers on in man and may well be the source of his desire to recapture the unity within continuity that as an adult he has left behind.

Death is the most obvious of the possible spaces of continuity open to the adult. Garca Ponce explains that "para romper la discontinuidad que al precipitarnos en la vida nos separa de la naturaleza y los otros, el primer camino inmediato es la muerte, que nos regresa a la continuidad impersonal." (p.92) Death destroys the particular manifestation of life, discontinuous man, but does not touch the impersonal, continuous spirit of life, rather it reveals it in its repetitive cycle and its interdependence with death. Death, however, is little consolation to man because it makes the images invisible, and of course the disadvantages of its permanence are obvious. As a space of liberation it is a last resort.

Bataille has shown us that there is another space of continuity: eroticism, in which, as Garca Ponce says, "se realiza una unión con el otro y con la vida que nos saca del tiempo y la discontinuidad que se cierra al ser." (p.94) Its disadvantage is the fleetingness of the experience, yet in that moment, man dissolves as does the world, and when they both are reformulated, man--sensitive man--comes away with a new insight into so-called reality. It has been unmasked, stripped of its apparent absoluteness, debunked of its solidity, shown to be susceptible to a power capable of

making it disappear. At the same time, when man dissolves into pure intensity, losing the central and centralizing "I", time stops, as Octavio Paz and others have said. The countless analogies of the sexual act and death have their basis in the shared, common space of continuity. Both are a violation of the personal, discontinuous being, impersonalizing it, making it participate in the indifferentiated continuity of nothing: simultaneous everything.

Bataille has also drawn the parallels between eroticism, death and mysticism. The mystic also seeks to dissolve into a transcendent Being or into a state of absolute unity with the Other, sometimes called God or the world or total spirit. Under any name it means unity without limits, free of divisive particularities. Like in the other spaces, the particular individual becomes impersonal in the dissolution of the self. The Occidental mystic often has compared his experience to the sexual act, i. e.: that canonized master of eroticism, San Juan de la Cruz. They share the space of simultaneous continuity.

The space of continuity which interests us here is that of art, and literature as one of its forms. Art, as García Ponce explains, is the sacred: "es justamente la continuidad del ser revelado a aquellos que fijan su atención, mediante un rito solemne, en la muerte de un ser discontinuo." (p.95) The artist tears the world and man from discontinuous reality and converts them into images or words; reality dies, becomes impersonal outside of sequential time, and that other life of continuity is revealed. The images are fixed in a permanence where, free of the devouring flow of time, they can manifest themselves, offering man the opportunity to experience again and again his own reflection in them. The victim of the sacrifice

is a particular individual, but it becomes impersonal in its permanence, in its liberation from movement to which all individuals are chained, though its surface remains that of the individual. A paradox? Admittedly; but as Donald Castro has so aptly shown in his study of I Am Joaquín,⁴ paradox is a vital, creative force. However, Castro just as aptly perceived the most difficult question concerning the claim of continuity in literary space: how can a sequential material, language, give rise to a totally simultaneous space? I would be remiss if I would avoid his question.

All art begins with discontinuous prime matter, but the visual arts can -- supposedly -- be experienced at one glance, while literature and music can not be. This view is common, but let us examine it. I have long doubted that we really experience the visual arts at a glance, but rather, the eye concentrates on one point of the painting and takes in the whole within the aura of vision around the focal point. If one stands too close to a painting, the aura will not cover the canvas, and in many cases divide colors into tones where the artist sought unity. Only by standing at a distance will the canvas be perceived as a whole, though still the eye will focus on some area. If we consider sculpture, the problem is compounded with perspectives impossible to simultaneously perceive. However, in the relationship of experience to object, the limitations are transcended by the onlooker who, armed with recall, can in some way join these perspectives. On a still higher level, that of the object itself, all these perspectives are simultaneously offered and possible, and each creates a point of tension in its role of one of the total sum of elements. The object itself is that sum of tensions. In written matter,

la escritura, the images on page eleven are not on page two hundred and twenty, but in the reader, who like the onlooker can place himself at a distance, they can coincide, and the work is the tension of all its elements in relationship simultaneously. In the space of literature, the images have been sacrificed in their discontinuous particularity, language, to become impersonal, atemporal images. The permanent, fixed nature of writing is exactly the means of saving them from sequential time, of depersonalizing them, of allowing them to become art where they are simultaneous. Borges sums up the paradox in "El aleph," where total simultaneity is impossible to capture in language. But the vitality of paradox is that it does not resolve itself, forcing a continual dialectic.

What this all means is that man's images are revealed outside of himself, and outside of contingency, in the Other which is the world transfixed outside of time. Man is united with the Other in art. Octavio Paz, in speaking of the image in poetry, explains the process we are discussing in the following manner:

La imagen transmuta al hombre y lo convierte a su vez en imagen, esto es, en espacio donde los contrarios se funden. Y el hombre mismo, desgarrado desde el nacer, se reconcilia consigo cuando se hace imagen, cuando se hace otro. La poesía es metamorfosis, cambio, operación alquímica, y por eso colinda con la magia, la religión y otras tentativas para transformar al hombre y hacer de "este" y de "aquel" ese "otro" que es el mismo. El universo deja de ser un vasto almacén de cosas heterogéneas . . . La poesía pone al hombre fuera de sí y, simultáneamente, lo hace regresar a su ser original: lo vuelve a sí. El hombre es su imagen: el mismo y aquel otro . . . La poesía es entrar en el ser. (El arco y la lira, p. 113)

This lengthy introduction was necessary so that we -- you who reads and I -- can have some basis for understanding, though it be ambiguous at times.

Chicano Literary Space

Chicanos have been especially victimized by the chaos of their surroundings in that even the fleeting reflections of man are not of us. We can find ourselves in pieces of art that achieve universality; that is to say that the basic human quality of continuity which such pieces reveal will reflect our own humanity. However, the surface image is still a particularity, and until recently those surfaces -- and the page of a book is surface -- excluded us in a dual fashion: 1) it was not a Chicano particularity being sacrificed and universalized on that surface; and 2) with respect to the surfaces themselves, they were not readily available to Chicano artists. The sense of general alienation from Anglo-American society was reinforced in the Arts.

When the Chicano movement began, we looked around for art that we could relate to. For some time we ran to the Mexican arts and rejected the Anglo influences on us. Though this confusion still persists, we have begun to create our own art instead of reaching for Mexican models and blindly rejecting all Anglo ones. Chicano writers are becoming freer to write as they please. However, no one would deny the predominance of the Mexican and the American influences; yet, we are neither, as we are not Mexican-American. I propose that we are the space (not the hyphen) between the two, the intercultural nothing of that space.⁵ We are continually expanding that space, pushing the two out and apart as we build our own separate reality, while at the same time creating strong bonds of interlocking tension that hold the two in

relationship. Each Chicano work opens a space for its existence and adds to the total space of Chicano art as well as Art itself. No Chicano represents all Chicano art, yet each does manifest, in the particular, the impersonal totality of it. Each addition, be it traditional or an extreme departure, has a legitimate place, and each enters into the process of continuity. Chicano art is the space created by the tensions of all its particular manifestations. It is the nothing of that continuous space where all possibilities are simultaneously possible and all achieved products are simultaneously in relationship, creating one unit. We may concentrate on one, but is only a particular surface leading to the space of all: the impersonal, continuous nothing.

As for our language, it too is neither Spanish or English, nor bilingual. We do not go from one to the other, nor do we keep them separate. The two are in dynamic tension creating a new, interlingual "language." Ricardo Sanchez calls it the tertiary principle. I prefer the term interlingual, because as Ricardo himself has demonstrated, the two languages fragment into types of Spanish and English, and what the Chicano speaks is the product of many fragments. Using the same principle I have been expounding, Chicanismo is the sum total of all our modes of expression, and no one alone.

We must avoid classifications that would attempt to define the characteristics of Chicano Art. (I am fully, joyfully and perversely cognizant of the application of that statement to my own work.) The critic should accept his role as just another force in the interplay of tensions. I will address myself more extensively to how he can do so at a later point.

Chicano literary space, thus, is like all artistic space, sharing the same characteristics of continuity: atemporal, non-divisive simultaneity. What is its originality? In the common connotations of the word, none; in the Octavio Paz sense, all. There is a particularity, even a newness, but as Paz has explained (as Unamuno before, not to mention countless others), originality is when we become the same as all the others in a process such as I have been describing. But it should be remembered that only through a particularity, in our case the Mexican and American influences and our interlingual, intercultural autodefinition, does one enter the impersonal continuity of nothing where one can be the other, because in truth there is no longer any, but all.

Application

The test of a theory is in its application. I have chosen a few pieces in which man's struggle with chaos and the resolution of the conflict by turning to literary space are evident. It is not my intent to study these works in depth here, but only to indicate rapidly how the pattern of chaotic discontinuity-→image retrieving-→union-→continuous literary space is found in some representative Chicano works.

José Montoya's poem "El Louie" begins from the ultimate destruction of the temporal being: Louie is dead. Time has devoured Louie's image, but death, like literature, is atemporal and all of Louie's life is now simultaneously fixed outside of discontinuity. However, death is an invisible continuity, and so the artist must retrieve the disappeared images from time and give them a space within which they can become visible. That space is the poem which presents the images to us, the images of a specific man, Louie, while it consciously transforms him into

a prototype of a group. In the center of the poem Louie's personal presence is felt in the use of dialogue. His life, void of channels of expression, ends in a lonely hotel room. Yet the poem has opened a space for his life, and death, to be replayed continually. Louie is retrieved from the initial disappearance and he becomes the image of the pachuco, a particular Chicano type in which all of us can identify to some degree, and a Chicano particularity with which all men can identify to some degree, and on up the universalizing ladder.

Raul Salinas' "A Trip through the Mind Jail"⁷ functions in a similar manner, but instead of a death, the poem opens with the destruction of a barrio: "La Lonia/ Neighborhood of my youth/demolished, erased forever from/the universe." (p. 339) The center of the universe, home, has disappeared, which means that order also is gone, resulting in the threat of chaos only alluded to here, but made more explicit further on. Following the chaos image, the poem states: "You live on, captive, in the lonely/cellblocks of my mind." (p. 339) We are in the presence of the poet about to tear the devoured images from chaos and from the invisibility of mere memory, and fix them in the space the poem will open for itself with its own unfolding. The poem's voice begins its trip through the barrio, establishing two types of interior orders. One is made of the places like Zaragoza Park, Guadalupe Church and others, all particular, nameable objects, sign posts of the space of the poem. The second is a temporal tracing of the life of the narrator's peer group with its markers of specific experiences. The second is played out on the background of the first, and together they represent the lost barrio and life images. As in "El Louie" the absence of channels leads the pachuco to death or prison, the narrator's fate. In the third to last strophe the significance of the trip for the poet

is revealed, introducing an element not found in "El Louie."

i needed you then... identity... a sense of belonging.

i need you now.

So essential to adult days of imprisonment.

you keep me away from INSANITY'S hungry jaws;

Smiling/Laughing/Crying. (p. 344)

The chaos of insanity is opposed to the order and meaning given him by the barrio. Destroyed by contingent reality, the barrio exists now in the literary space opened for it by the poem, and only in the poem. However, chaotic reality does not disappear and still threatens at the end of the trip. What has changed is artist and the reader who take strength from the retrieved images so that they might resist the chaos that would destroy them as well. The generalization of the particular images of La Loma is achieved through the enumeration of other barrios from across the Southwest. The process is complete.

I was fortunate to witness this process in the Fall of 1974 when Ricardo Sánchez visited Yale. He prefaced the reading of a poem by explaining that it was about his barrio in El Paso. A student commented that it no longer existed. Ricardo responded by reading the poem and his barrio appeared in the MECHA meeting room, retrieved by the voice of the poem and given a new space, a literary space, in which to perpetually exist.

The epic poem I Am Joaquin also begins with images of the narrator lost in chaos.

I am Joaquín,
 lost in a world of confusion,
 caught up in the whirl of a
 gringo society,
 confused by the rules,
 scorned by attitudes,
 suppressed by manipulation,
 and destroyed by modern society.⁸

The first thirty lines of the poem develop the chaos theme, introducing the conflicting choices open to the Chicano: acculturation with loss of the spirit but a full stomach, or cultural separatism with spiritual wholeness but hunger. This conflict could be interpreted as being between the chaotic disappearance of the self and cultural affirmation as a defense and survival technique. Before resolving the conflict, however, Joaquín makes a voyage through history similar to that seen in the Salina's poem, but on a more grandiose scale, gathering the images from the centuries. The poem will arrive at unity, but it will restate the conflict several times before the end. The following is one of those times (emphasis mine).

I shed the tears of anguish
 as I see my children disappear
 behind the shroud of mediocrity,
never to look back to remember me.
 I am Joaquín.

I must fight
 and win this struggle
 for my sons and they
 must know from me
 who I am. (p. 82)

Structurally, this passage is an interior duplication of the poem. The menace of disappearing into acculturation and losing the self images is stated, followed by Joaquin's affirmation of his reality, which in turn gives rise to the struggle aimed at passing the self images on to the future generations. The affirmation is the sum of all the images gathered which at the end of the Poem allows Joaquin to reject chaos and project his images into the future tense: "I SHALL ENDURE!/I WILL ENDURE!" (p. 100)

Let us reconsider how and from whence comes this new found assurance and liberation in the face of what at the beginning seemed overwhelming odds. The segment from page 82 quoted above gives us the key. The image-devouring discontinuity of chaotic reality is the menace. Joaquin sees his children, who are his images, disappear into Anglo-Americanism. His goal is to resist the power of chaos and assert the enduring value of Joaquin, the Chicano. The strength needed for achieving the goal comes from knowing his place and value in a meaningful order. Such knowledge comes from contemplating his reflection in the recovered images. Joaquin's self confidence can be willed to his sons, who, armed with a sense of pride based on that order, can face and counterattack oppressive so-

ciety. Those images are displayed in the poem; in its space they are enumerated and offered to Joaquín's sona. Those images are no longer invisible because they now have an atemporal space in which to survive, develop and manifest themselves to the reader and give him strength. Those images, in their related tension, are Joaquín, the Chicano Everyman who is at once one and all Chicanos, thanks to the impersonalization process of literature. He is each successive image in its singularity, but in the poem's totality, he is all the images at once, a solitary, completely simultaneous image: Joaquín. It is no accident that the title is I Am Joaquín, for the poem, the space in which all the images are retrieved, displayed, given continual life and unity, is Joaquín; and Joaquín is the poem. The affirmation is the whole image, including conflict, process, resolution and projection, everything. Where does the miracle of unity happen? In the space opened by the poem to which we can return always. Literary space has been tapped by the word, opened, populated and the journey through it, as in Salinas' poem, gives strength to the reader. We can politically agree or disagree with the concepts of I Am Joaquín, but it can not be said that it is not a well constructed piece of literature that thematically and technically utilizes, and thus exemplifies, the miracle of literary space.⁹

With my first prose example, permit me to clarify a possible misconception. Not always are the images conserved in literary space positive ones. Often they are of the victory of chaos over the characters; but even these images are susceptible to the process of art and partake of the space of continuity when fixed in it. An example is "A Rosary for Doña Marina,"¹⁰ the Octavio Romano short story about

the dissolution of a family and the protagonist's self-caused loneliness. The images of destruction, of death, are firmly etched by Doña Marina's ritualized hand movements, essentially the same ones over and over when gutting fish (repeated symbolically in the abortionist's hands to which she delivers her niece), cooking, tearing the heart out of a shattered watermelon, chopping up her cousin's bed, and of course, fingering her rosary. The images exist in the space of the story and we can reflect on them and even see ourselves in them. But beyond that, the story uses that space thematically.

When Doña Marina senses that she has destroyed her family, she prays to the Virgin Mary, asking to be seen, heard and helped. Her prayers are answered by the reader who hears her story, sees her suffering and helps her by giving life to the images of her family. Doña Marina lives in the reading. The title, "A Rosary for Doña Marina"(emphasis mine), and the small circles between segments take on meaning. The reader prays the rosary for Doña Marina. It is the story itself and the circles are the beads. She lives in our prayers. A further irony is that by analogy our hands become her hands; our movements, hers. And are not the hand movements as we read the book, the turning of the pages and perhaps the running of a finger down the lines, similar to those images irrevocably captured in the story? Do we not share Marina's potential for self-destruction? And is it not literature that even now poses the questions to you? Tal vez.

...y no se lo tragó la tierra, by Tomás Rivera, brings us back to the positive images. Structurally it resembles the previous examples, but it is much more complex. The book consists of fourteen short stories and thirteen vignettes,

which leave the reader with the distinct impression that he has read a novel. The apparently loose structure reflects the chaos in which the protagonists finds himself at the beginning.

Aquel año se le perdió . . . se le perdían las palabras . . .
empezaba con un sueño despertaba de pronto y luego se
daba cuenta de que realmente estaba dormido . . .
Siempre empezaba todo cuando oía que alguien lo llamaba
por su nombre . . . y luego hasta se le olvidaba el
nombre que le habían llamado. Pero sabía que él
era a quien llamaban . . . Se dio cuenta de que él
mismo se había llamado. Y así empezó el año
perdido.

Trataba de acertar cuándo había empezado aquel
tiempo que había llegado a llamar año. Se dio cuenta
de que siempre pensaba que pensaba y de allí no
podía salir. Luego se ponía a pensar en que nunca
pensaba y era cuando se le volvía todo blanco y
se quedaba dormido. Pero antes de dormirse
veía y oía muchas cosas. . . ll

A clearer picture of chaos would be harder to find. The protagonist has lost the words, he is confused in the time sequence and he is rationally disoriented. Yet in a way he is fortunate, because the chaos of this apparent insanity will lead him to the discovery of literary space.

The stories and vignettes relate the boy's disjointed memories and possibly even future scenes. In the process of the narration it becomes apparent in the first half of the book that fear and oppression are overriding concerns in the boy's life. This segment notably opens with the death of a child. In the center of the book are placed two stories in which fear and oppression lead him to deny first

the devil then God, thus rejecting the fundamental figures of Christianity. After the denial, the stories deal with his social ambiente and death again is a constant factor. The realization of the absence of absolutes does not change the surrounding reality; death and oppression will not disappear, and the boy sees this clearly. No panaceas are offered to replace life. Instead, he will learn the greater lesson: the process of art.

The boy begins the book by losing a year, and in truth he is losing the images of life as they disappear in the sequential flow of time. But we are told explicitly that "se le perdían las palabras." (p. 1) In the last story, "Debajo de la casa," the year is regained, the images are all gathered, and what we have read is the boy's version of his memories and imagined scenes recalled while hiding under a house to escape from fear. The people call him crazy, but when he comes out he no longer displays symptoms of disorientation. He has discovered that he can join the images.

. . . se dio cuenta de que en realidad no había perdido nada. Había encontrado. Encontrar y recontrar y juntar. Relacionar esto con esto, eso con aquello, todo con todo . . . Eso era todo. Y le dio más gusto. Luego cuando llegó a casa se fue al árbol que estaba en el solar. Se subió. En el horizonte encontró una palma y se imaginó que ahí estaba alguien trepado viéndolo a él. Y hasta levantó el brazo y lo movió para atrás y para adelante para que viera que él sabía que estaba allí. (emphasis mine) (p. 169)

He has learned that the images do not have to be lost, that they can be retrieved and given a space where they can be related and joined in some order. At the point of

discovery, that place is the imagination, but they will fade if left there. Everyday life will devour them. That is what the boy means when he says "apenas estando uno solo puede juntar a todos." (p. 168) He must fix them in art. The projection of the self image as the Other in the last scene proves he has learned the lesson. He is practicing the skill of the artist. Also, we have read ~~the~~ book which the boy has imagined. I am not playing naive games of believing in the "Reality" of the character, but rather the serious game of believing in the reality of the book. My reading gives existence to the boy's narrative which is his learning process. The need to display those fragments in a manner that relates and unifies them is thematically central to the work. The reader provides the proof of the boy's discovery which is the work and only exists as a unit in the space of it, the literary space, which after all, is the only place the boy really exists, and will go on existing free of time, death and fear; the space the boy has found in the words he has recovered to keep himself from being lost.

Bless Me, Ultima,¹² Rudolfo Anaya's best selling novel, is the story of a boy's apprenticeship, but not to become a curandero as might be supposed from the fact that his mentor, Ultima, is a curandera, but rather to become a writer who needs literary space to achieve fully the promise of his apprenticeship. The novel is complex and requires our careful attention to see the function of space at various levels.

Antonio, the protagonist-narrator, during the temporal duration of two years which the novel covers, is between childhood and adulthood, and the two worlds

are kept in the balance until the end. Antonio perceives the world as divided into two opposing factions: his father and the llanero Mares family vs. his mother and the farming Lunas, night vs. day, questioning vs. understanding, good vs. evil, death vs. life, Catholicism vs. the naturalistic religion of the Golden Carp. The underlying conflict seems to be between linear and cyclical time. And in the middle stands Antonio, seeking understanding and fearing that he will be left alone. (p. 6)

During one of Antonio's frequent, prophetic dreams, the conflict is expressed in the fear that "the cosmic struggle of the two forces (water vs. land, Mares vs. Lunas, etc.) would destroy everything!" (p. 112) In the face of menacing chaos, Ultima appears and explains that the elements are not opposed but complimentary. "The waters are one, Antonio... You have been seeing only parts, she finished, and not looking beyond into the great cycle that binds us all." (p. 113) Near the end of the novel, Antonio experiences the same revelation in a conscious state as he and a friend watch the Golden Carp. "Seeing him made questions and worries evaporate, and I remained transfixed, caught and caressed by the essential elements of sky and earth and water. The sun warmed us with its life giving power, and up in the sky a white moon smiled on us." (p. 227)

The trail leading to the revelation of continuity is strewn, however, with strife. Antonio witnesses evil deeds, witchcraft, murders and even the disintegration of his family. All through these intense years, Antonio has one goal: understanding; and he is assured that it will be achieved with his First Holy Communion. We again find religion in its discontinuous role. Antonio is swept into the linear,

social progression of the church and school calendars which promise knowledge. Neither satisfy him. He learns more from outcast friends, the Golden Carp, and of course, through Ultima. He learns, apparently, that linear time and its proponents are false, and cyclical time is true. Nevertheless, this simplification also is divisive, discontinuous, and Ultima has cautioned him against such separations. The world is harmony and unity.

The natural union of forces is symbolized by Antonio's father's repairing the windmill, a circular object being torn apart by the linear winds. Repaired, the windmill and the wind work together in harmony for the good of man and nature. The importance of the act is heightened by its narrative position directly after the scene in which the older brothers decide to leave and dash the hopes of the father. He faces chaos by restoring order, even though the menacing chaos of his sons can not be changed, only the windmill over which he has some control. Antonio, too, will face the same menace and his response is the same.

At the end of the novel, after Antonio has reached the epiphany of continuity, his new, mistaken hierarchy built around Ultima is toppled. Ultima's familiar, an owl, is shot by an enemy and she dies. "That shot destroyed the quiet, moonlit peace of the hill, and it shattered my childhood into a thousand fragments that long ago stopped falling and are now dusty relics gathered in distant memories." (p. 245) This powerful image is perturbing, coming at the end of a novel which to all appearances proposes the harmonious unity of the world. Ultima's death underscores the image by stealing away her discontinuous, personal presence.

This ending, however, is really the beginning of the story of the narration of the novel, and, as you might expect, where literary space becomes the key.

Antonio's childhood is shattered by one more in a string of death, this time the particular, specific death of Ultima. At this point there reverberates in the reader's memory Antonio's first words to Ultima after meeting her: "You will never die, Ultima,...I will take care of you."(p.11). A naive, childish comment? Perhaps; but the irony of it is heightened by the structural equilibrium it forms in the harmony of continuity from Ultima, and then is powerless in the face of death that would conceal the life images and steal his childhood. The book ends, but Antonio's problem begins: how to keep his promise to Ultima and affirm the truth of his apprenticeship?

To return to childhood is impossible, but the space of literature, that shares the same characteristics, is open to Antonio, and he becomes the narrator of the novel. He turns the menacing face of obfuscating death around to reveal its manifesting twin: literature. Antonio creates the novel's space where all the memories fragmented in the adult mind ruled by reason are animated with life, joined, related and united as the narrative voice of ... y no se lo tragó la tierra would say. Antonio narrates the story to keep his promise to Ultima within a space of total harmony and unity analogous to the one she revealed to him, and in truth one and the same. As when a child all the world converged in him, now as narrator he creates the focal point for the images: the novel.

When at the end of the book he states "Ultima was really buried here," (p. 248) that here is the novel. Her death and life, another harmonious balance when seen from the perspective of continuity, are firmly fixed in literature where they can display the splendid movement of life; though after the narrative act is complete, Antonio's goals are only fulfilled through the reader's participation, through the constant and infinite, possible readings which make Ultima live. Antonio's promise is kept when he becomes a writer and we become readers. Where? In the novel; in literary space.

Antonio repeats his father's action with the windmill, and the explanation of this point recalls Donald Castro's question of how can a sequential material, language, create simultaneous reality. Antonio and his father restore harmony when menaced by chaos. The material of the novel is like the windmill; the wind, language. The narrator creates the two in harmony to produce literature, a continuous, life flow like water, and Ultima has explained the total unity of water. (p. 113)

My last example, a brief one, is an unpublished poem by Ricardo Sánchez: "Nagaza en las entrañas del caleidoscopio humano." The central voice of the poem is confronted by four consciousnesses, all vying for predominance. They begin as separate, identifiable ideological positions, then as if in a turning kaleidoscope they begin to fragment and change their interrelationship as they argue. The tensions mount until the central voice screams that he, and only he, will decide what he will be. This ending is ironical, because it is not clear if the Nagaza (ardido trampa;

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medio hábil con que se obtiene de alguien lo que se pretende) is on the part of the central voice or the four consciousnesses or on the part of the poem itself. The poem exemplifies Sánchez' philosophy of liberation and personal auto-definition, but also it demonstrates literary space. The voices create an interplay of tensions which in the end are the central voice because the true voice is that of the poem. Like the kaleidoscope, the central voice is the unified image of delicately balanced fragments. The possible combinations are endless, but the poem is the sum total of all of them. The poem creates the space for them to revolve and explore the multiple structures they can form. The reader, too, enters into the kaleidoscope and total unity is created: the poem. "Ñagaza" demonstrates the conversion of discontinuous images into a continuous space, while also showing how within a fixed order of language the image created is one of movement.

Of special importance in "Ñagaza" is Sánchez' use of language as an interlingual force. The forces at play in the poem express themselves in the multiple forms employed by Chicanos, and as the consciousnesses change in the design of the kaleidoscope, the variations in the language are analogous. No one voice is Chicanismo, but rather it is the central voice created by all the possibilities.

I have chosen "Ñagaza" as the last example because it points the way to the space of Chicano language as in interlingual mode of expression much beyond the simplistic theory of bilingualism. It points to the future in an exciting

manner, with a power unmatched at this moment in Chicano literature except by Ricardo Sánchez' total work. And also because the central image of the poem, the poem itself, is the image of my concept of literary space.

These examples of the application of the idea of literary space, though brief and certainly not detailed in this essay, demonstrate the possibilities it offers to criticism on several levels; and I hope that in passing, some doors to the works themselves have been opened.

The Role of the Literary Critic

The only goal of the literary critic should be to lead the reader back to the literary work itself with a new capacity to enjoy it more fully. In the face of those who would ask the critic for simplification, easily learned categories in the name of academic clarity, the critic must declare his fidelity to the irreducible ambiguities of such things as paradox, metaphor, the image, the ineffable; to literature as literature. Criticism, as I understand it, has a dual role with respect to the reader, determined by the prior experience of the reader. First, for the reader who comes to the critic having read the work under consideration, criticism should help him understand what he has experienced, amplifying and deepening his comprehension of the work and the pleasure it has given him, doing so through the multiplication of perspectives and the revelation of the thematic and stylistic coherence of the work. Finally, it should take him back to the work ready for an expanded experience. Second, for the reader who has not read the work, criticism should not simplify and destroy the work in its essence as vital experience. The

reader should never be allowed to substitute criticism for the direct reading of the prime matter. This can never be the function of criticism. The balance between these two functions is precarious.

The first duty of the critics is to read as unbiasedly as possible, suspending judgement until after finishing the work. Read for enjoyment first. In an earlier essay I stated it thus:

What I want is post-analysis, that is, ... read first, without any pre-established norms, without fixed absolutes. Enter a book not to seek something in particular, but to open to whatever it contains. The book will reveal itself... Books are. Read them for themselves and not for what they represent. For in truth they represent only themselves. 13

I would now add that reading should begin from the nothing which all possibilities are simultaneously possible, and allow the work to guide the movement. The nothing I have described earlier should be accepted as a vital space, an advantageous perspective. No pre-established shackles on writer or reader.

The critic must make every effort to expand the total space of our literature. He can point out fields of experience ignored by the writers, such as the middle class one, long avoided for fear of the vendido label; or the oppression of Chicanos by other Chicanos in the name of cultural, social or political goals; or the Chicana as seen by her. He can dedicate more time to writing and learn his profession well. Most importantly he must take joy and pride in the variety of Chicano literature and deal with it in a creative manner equal to that of the works themselves. Lastly, he can help create a space of Chicano criticism in

Which all the theories act as interrelated tensions to in turn create the central
sum of Chienno perspectives. That center will be where the opinions can con-
trast and compare themselves. Each work can be studies from many perspec-
tives, with none becoming the grid for all others. We should seek to maintain
the nothingness of literary space, for only from nothing are there infinite possi-
bilities -- all simultaneously possible. Only in nothing can you find everything.

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Notes

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¹ Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959).

² Garfía Ponce, La aparición de lo invisible (México: Siglo XXI, 1969), pp. 77-100.

³ G. Bataille, L'Érotisme (Paris: Ed. de Minuit, 1957).

⁴ D. Castro, paper presented at the First National Symposium on Chicano Literature and Cultural Analysis, Las Vegas, New Mexico, Nov. 21-22, 1974.

⁵ This space is not a "gap" as someone has suggested, for a gap suggests that the two elements should come together. I call it a space that should expand and grow, not disappear. We are that space. No gap; not at all.

⁶ J. Montoya, Aztlan, An Anthology of Mexican American Literature (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), pp. 333-337.

⁷ R. Salinas, *Ibid.*, pp. 339-344.

⁸ El Ajá Jengala (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), p. 6.

⁹ Two other works that function in a very similar fashion with respect to the gathering of historical images from long periods of time to arrive at a projection of the images into the future, are the Teatro Campesino's play La Carga de los Rascachis and the soon to be published novel Tierra of Blood by Urista. Both begin and end with the eteale image and the evocation of myth. Tierra of Blood is of special interest in the lyric-prose frame which consciously removes the work from the genre of historical novel and places it along side of Thomas Mann's

Joseph and His Brothers and other such novels that create the cyclical return of mythical structures within an apparently linear historical time reference, and in so doing, tap the continuity of mythical space, another space of continuity.

¹⁰ O. Romano, El espejo (Berkeley: Quinto Sol, 1972), pp. 73-93.

¹¹ T. Rivera, ...y no se lo trajo la Herra (Berkeley: Quinto Sol, 1970).

¹² R. Anaya, Bless Me, Ultima (Berkeley: Quinto Sol, 1972).

¹³ Bruce-Novoa, "Freedom of Expression and the Chicano Movement,"

La Juch, Sept. 1973, p. 29.

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LA PROSA CHICANA:
TRES KÍGONOS DE LA NOVELA MEXICANA DE LA REVOLUCIÓN

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Tres son los prosistas méxicoamericanos, mejor conocidos por chicanos en los E. E. U. U., que en la actualidad escriben en español y que siguen una modalidad que nosotros denominaríamos continuación de la novela mexicana de la Revolución. A saber son Tomás Rivera, autor de Y no se lo tragó la tierra, obra que ganó el primer premio Quinto Sol en 1970, Rolando R. Hinojosa-S, cuya obra Estampas del Valle y otras obras fue otorgada el primer premio Quinto Sol en 1973, y Miguel Méndez M., autor de Peregrinos de Aztlán, novela que se publicó en 1974.

Al hablar de la novela mexicana de la Revolución uno inmediatamente piensa en las obras que hoy se conocen como obras clásicas, es decir Los de abajo, La sombra del caudillo y Mi caballo, mi perro y mi rifle. Incluimos en este grupo El águila y la serpiente, obra que para nosotros no es novela aunque muchos la consideren novela sui generis, y muchas otras obras que se salvan del anonimato por haber superado en alguno de los cuatro elementos narrativos esenciales, la trama, el desarrollo de personajes, el estilo, y los problemas y soluciones a éstos que el autor plantea.

Beryl J. M. McManus en su estudio, "La técnica del nuevo realismo en la novela mexicana de la Revolución," ya había separado algunos de los rasgos característicos de esta prosa, que son los siguientes;

1. La novela carece de protagonista; ahora es el pueblo el personaje más importante.
2. Por lo general los novelistas no enfocan el interés ni en la trama ni en el estilo.

3. El nuevo realismo se destaca por el número de personajes provincianos, típicos de las regiones de que las cuales provienen, ya sean de Chihuahua, de Michoacán, de Sonora o de otros estados.
4. El habla típico de esta gente forma parte del lenguaje literario.
5. El paisaje se describe extensamente.
6. La obra es breve; sus capítulos o divisiones todos son cortos.
7. La técnica descriptiva, ya bien sea para describir personajes o la naturaleza, es concisa y rápida.
8. El estilo es cortado y directo.
9. Muchas obras contienen cierto espíritu satírico, cuyo único valor es la crítica social.

Además de estos rasgos característicos de la novela mexicana de la Revolución, McManus nos da cuatro etapas de desarrollo de la novela: "(1) causas del conflicto, (2) descripción de la vida revolucionaria durante el período de lucha activa (1910-1916), (3) el conflicto político y el trastorno entre los elementos civiles, (4) los problemas de la reconstrucción que son el problema político, la cuestión religiosa, el problema obrero, el problema agrario y el problema del indio, el problema de la educación."¹

Los rasgos arriba mencionados han sido resuscitados por los escritores chicanos quienes han ido fraguándolos para forjar su propia estilística y medio literario. Esos rasgos ahora se vinculan a los problemas sociales estadounidenses, y con esto los escritores exponen las luchas políticas, sociales, y económicas del pueblo hispanoparlante americano.

Tomás Rivera nació en Crystal City, Texas, en el año de 1935; estudió en Southwest Texas State University y en la Universidad de Oklahoma donde le conferieron el título de Doctor en Literatura en 1969. Ha sido profesor en las escuelas elementales de Texas, en Southwest Texas Junior College y en la Universidad de Sam Houston en Huntsville, Texas. Ahora es decano en la Universidad de Texas, San Antonio.

En 1970 se publicó Y no se lo tragó la tierra, una colección de cuentos, estructurada en catorce cuentos breves y sencillos. La lectura es rápida, las descripciones de los campos donde trabajan los campesinos son breves; su función es ubicar a los personajes anónimos en un ambiente antihigiénico, sin agua potable, sin retretes, trabajo en soles brutales y viviendas que por lo general son gallineros.

La caracterización de los personajes en los cuentos por lo común carece de nombres que distingue el género del personaje. En este Rivera logra la anonimidad que es rasgo característico de muchas obras mexicanas de la Revolución.

Aunque Rivera descuida el estilo--es decir el uso del lenguaje figurado es mínimo--sí presta gran atención a la estructura de sus cuentos y a toda la obra en general. El cuento pasa del ambiente a la introducción del tema y finalmente al desenlace que en la mayoría de los cuentos es inesperado y sorprendente. Los cuentos carecen no sólo de caracterización de los personajes sino también de la trama. Rivera omite estos dos elementos para atacar a los problemas sociales, como lo hace Gregorio López y Fuentes en Tierra (1932) y Mauricio Magdaleno en El Resplandor (1937).

La unidad de la obra se logra a través del punto de vista del niño narrador quien ve y oye los sucesos que se tratan en los cuentos. El primer y último cuento sirven de marco a la obra; los otros doce cuentos entre el primero y el último, configuran los doce meses del año.

El título del primer cuento es "El año perdido." El tema de éste igualmente como los temas de los otros doce aparecen en un resumen en el último cuento "Debajo de la casa." Vemos a través de dos monólogos interiores pasar ante nosotros un trozo de cada uno de los trece cuentos anteriores. Concluye el niño narrador que ha logrado aprender muchísimo a pesar de haber fracasado como alumno en la escuela. Con este broche de oro cierra Rivera obra: "Y no se lo tragó la tierra."

Ahora pasaremos a discutir cuatro de los cuentos: "El año perdido," "Los niños no se aguantaron," "Es que duele," y "Y no se lo tragó la tierra."

"El año perdido," el primer cuento, se desarrolla en una serie de tiempos trastornados. Es probable que el autor esté jugando con su propia imaginación y pensamientos. Elabora un juego de tiempo verbales que no relatan más que la confusión de los pensamientos del personaje anónimo. La narración es en tercera persona y la trama consiste sólo de lo que el personaje escucha, oye y piensa: Cree oír que le llaman, pero se da cuenta que él mismo se ha llamado. Todo lo que transcurre ocurre en la imaginación del personaje.

En el segundo cuento, "Los niños no se aguantaron," nos enteramos de los problemas del campesino. El cuento se desarrolla rápidamente, la caracterización

es breve y anónima. Con pocas palabras el autor define el problema del trabajo brutal en el sol y cómo el campesino tiene que desenvolver el trabajo sin ninguna seguridad o garantía de su bienestar. Contrabalancea Rivera el problema campesino con la codicia del dueño cuya meta es lograr las ganancias máximas. La acción se limita a las faenas campestres de los niños, a la sed de los niños movida por el solazo infernal, y el susto que el dueño quiere meterles con un rifle a los niños que se han ido a beber agua a un estanque vacuno.

El autor no tiene interés en las descripciones excesas. Parsiminosamente caracteriza niños y adultos, contrapone la sed contra la codicia y se precipita al desenlace trágico, la muerte del niño por un balazo en la frente. No hay interés por el lenguaje figurado, ni la descripción, ni la caracterización. Es el problema social el que lleva el mayor relieve en las consideraciones artísticas, y con esto Rivera es fiel a uno de los preceptos de la prosa de la Revolución mexicana, atacar los problemas sociales.

El cuento "Es que duele" expone las penas, la vergüenza o los contratiempos que tradicionalmente han conocido los chicanos en sus primeros días escolares. Rivera pone en relieve los problemas psicológicos que impiden el progreso del alumno que forzosamente tiene que sufrir el espulgo con lápices o tales útiles llevado a cabo por profesores que buscan los niños piojosos. Otro problema señalado es la cohibición y sufrimiento que sufren los niños chicanos ante los agujones racistas lanzados por los niños anglosajones. La trama del cuento revela como las habladuras culminan en un pleito entre un chicano y un anglosajón. El chicano es expulsado, y se va a casa pensando cómo los acontecimientos en la escuela le

causan dolor. El niño no sabe como resolver ese dolor y sufrimiento, y en un monólogo interior nos enteramos como piensa resolver sus problemas: "Yo creo que es mejor estarse uno acá en el rancho, aquí en la mota con sus gallineros, o en la labor se siente uno a lo menos más libre, más agusto."²

Habíamos dicho que el autor chicano ha ido forjando un lenguaje, que por lo general consiste de español mezclado con el inglés. Cito los casos siguientes: La maestra espulga al niño "con el palito de paleta o de ésquimo pie" (22). Después del pleito el niño interroga a la profesora: "¿Me va a llevar usted con la principal?" (22). Una vez expulsado el niño se va a casa con la report card" (26).

La experiencia infantil de Rivera, llena de supersticiones y creencias transmitidas por los adultos chicanos, forma material propicio del cual Rivera extrae temas literarios. En el cuento "Y no se lo tragó la tierra" Rivera expone la creencia popular, "quien maldice a Dios la tierra se lo traga." Hábilmente une Rivera el problema del trabajo brutal en temperaturas calurosas que conduce a la insolación con el deseo del hijo quien quiere maldecir a Dios por la mala fortuna en la vida y el estado jornalero que los hunde en la miseria.

La trama consiste del padre y los hijos que trabajan en el campo. El padre se enferma y el hijo lamenta el estado de la familia, que ya ha perdido a dos tíos tuberculosos. El niño quiere rebelarse contra Dios pero la madre lo calma. Al día siguiente se enferma el hijo menor. Con esto revienta de cólera el hijo mayor: "Luego empezó a echar maldiciones. Y no supo ni cuándo, pero lo que dijo lo había tenido ganas de decir desde hacía mucho tiempo. Maldijo a Dios. Al hacerlo

sintió el miedo infundido por los años y por sus padres. Por un segundo vio que se abría la tierra para tragárselo. Luego se sintió andando por la tierra bien apretada, más apretada que nunca. Entonces le entró el coraje de nuevo y se desahogó maldiciendo a Dios. " Con esto logra echar abajo el niño otra creencia más que impide su desarrollo normal. Se siente fuerte y seguro de sí mismo, listo para desafiar al sol, a la tierra y a toda la vida: "tenía una paz que nunca había sentido antes. Le parecía que se había separado de todo. ...se sentía capaz de hacer y deshacer cualquier cosa que él quisiera. Vio hacia la tierra y le dio una patada bien fuerte y le dijo: --Todavía no, todavía no me puedes tragar. Algún día, sí. Pero yo ni sabré" (70).

El cuento "Y no se lo tragó la tierra" nos presenta como tema "el empirismo contra la ignorancia." Este como el cuento "La noche plateada" deshace las viejas creencias entre el pueblo chicano, y a la vez la obra lleva cierta didáctica. Al final de ambos cuentos los niños pueden luchar mejor con sus mundos, y pueden triunfar en la vida. En "La noche plateada" el niño pierde el temor al diablo. En el cuento "Y no se lo tragó la tierra" el niño ya no teme a la muerte y también se resigna al trabajo brutal del campo.

Rolando R. Hinojosa nació en Mercedes, Texas. Estudió en la Universidad de Texas, la Universidad de Highlands (Las Vegas, Nuevo México), y se le confirió el grado de Doctor en Filosofía en la Universidad de Illinois. Sus experiencias de trabajo han sido diversas: jornalero en una planta química, cantinero, gerente de oficina por una compañía manufacturera de ropa, empleado en servicio civil oficial,

y profesor de escuela secundaria. Ha enseñado en la Universidad de Trinity (San Antonio, Texas), y fue jefe del Departamento de Lenguas Modernas en la Universidad Texas A & I en Kingsville, y ahora es decano en la misma.

Pasaremos ahora a la obra de Rolando Hinojosa, Estampas del Valle y otras obras, publicada en 1973. El tomo consiste de cuatro obras, "Estampas del Valle," "Por esas cosas que pasan," "Vidas y milagros" y Una vida de Rafa Buenrostro."

"Estampas del Valle" es una serie de narraciones breves que por lo general son bosquejos de tipos representativos de la sociedad chicana del Valle de Texas. En ella vemos camioneros, comerciantes, criadas, cantineros, prostitutas, curas, amantes, niños, adultos, abogados, estafadores, policas y estudiantes. La obra no tiene tema unificador. Así como en la obra de Martín Luis Guzmán, El águila y la serpiente, encontramos cuentos perfectos que sí tienen trama en sí, por ejemplo "Al pozo con Bruno Cano" que después discutiremos.

La prosa de Hinojosa difiere de la de Tomás Rivera en su ironía y humorismo. Hinojosa es retratista como muchos de los novelistas de la Revolución mexicana. Sus descripciones son más extensas que las de Rivera, pero aún son breves. Su estilo realista es sencillo y a veces grosero. Hinojosa, no como Rivera que prefiere el personaje anónimo, da nombres a sus personajes, y estos pasan de "Estampas del Valle" a las otras obras del tomo. Rivera se preocupa por los problemas sociales, mientras Hinojosa quiere captar la esencia humorística del pueblo chicano.

El rasgo estilístico más patente en la obra de Hinojosa es la ironía y el humor. En la nota preliminar ya se trasluce el humorismo del autor cuando se mofa de su

propia obra: "Estas estampas son y están como las greñas de Mencho Saldaña: unas cortas, otras largas y todas embardurnadas con esa grasa humana que las junta y las separa sin permiso de nadie."³

Entre los personajes de mayor relieve tenemos a la tía Chedes que es una mujer simple: "Cuando Vicky (la hija) le avisó a mi tía Chedes que dejaba la escuela para irse con una carpa de maromeros... mi tía Chedes lloró que fue un encanto: se desmayó, luego chilló, pataleó, se peyó, gritó y le dio el hipo; vamos, lo de siempre cuando se ponía nerviosa" (22). Uno de los maromeros se nos presenta en esta forma: "Leocadio Tovar (en las tablas Don Chon) soplabla la trompeta y el trombón, y tocaba la marimba de botellas con más ganas que talento. A veces donde falta una cosa hay que suplirle con otra" (27). Doña Panchita Zuárez era "sobandera, partera al pasito, y remendona fina de jovencitas no muy usadas y todavía en servible estado de merecer" (35). Melitón Burnias aparece como especie de idiota en el barrio: "Era algo sordo, flaco, chaparrito, de oficio desconocido y más seco que cagarruta de cabra en agosto" (35). Por último tenemos a la güera Fira:

Sin rodeos: La güera Fira es puta. No la hace de puta (como las criadas) ni putea (como las amas de las criadas); no. La güera Fira es puta y ya. Hay más. La güera Fira tiene los ojos azules, el pelo corto y no tiene que pintárselo y tiene unas formas que le quitaron el hipo al cura don Pedro Zamudio.

La güera Fira no es de aquí... Hija de mujer mexicana de Jonesville y de un soldado bolillo de Fort Jones: no fue la primera que saliera ni la última, pero la verdad, seguramente tiene que ser la mujer más hermosa del Valle.

La güera Fira es una mujer seria que lleva su putería como las chicas de la escuela llevan los libros: con naturalidad. Al bañarse, huele a agua y jabón y cuando sale a la calle rumbo a su trabajo, todavía le quedan húmedos los risitos en la sien (43).

"Al pozo con Bruno Cano" es un cuento excelente, bien estructurado y con una trama desarrollada: La muerte y el entierro de Bruno Cano. Un diálogo entre el cura don Pedro Zamudio y un amigo del difunto introduce el cuento. El cura rehusa llevar los sacramentos al entierro porque Bruno Cano le había mentado la madre a "todo un sacerdote de la santa madre iglesia" (35). Por fin el amigo convence al cura y la narración pasa a la muerte de Bruno Cano. En retrospectión sabemos cómo Cano, con la ayuda de Melitón Burnias, pensaba sacar un tesoro a media noche del solar de Doña Panchita Suárez. El cuento es muy gracioso por el juego de palabras y el malentendimiento que culmina en la muerte de Bruno Cano. Habían concordado los amigos que al dar con el tesoro Melitón Burnias rezaría unos rezos para ahuyentar al fantasma que supersticiosamente se cree cuida el tesoro. Cuando Cano toca algo firme con la pala, le anuncia al sordo de Burnias que están por sacar el tesoro, pero como Burnias no oye muy bien se precipita el siguiente malentendimiento:

¿Melitón, Melitón, no ofste? Creo que vamos cerca.
 ¿Qué si no of? ¿Qué si no of qué?
 Te digo que vamos cerca.
 Ah, sí, pues entonces, ¿qué rezo yo?
 ¿Qué?
 ¿Que qué rezo yo?
 ¿Cómo que qué resolló?
 ¿Que resolló algo?
 ¿Que resolló algo dices?
 ¿Qué resolló? ¡ay, Diosito mfo! (36).

Burnias corre y deja a Bruno Cano en el hoyo donde después de maldecir al cura muere se supone de un infarto.

La descripción donde el pueblo chicano aparece como personaje es la siguiente, donde el autor describe el entierro de Bruno Cano:

El entierro estuvo muy concurrido. La cosa duró cerca de siete horas. Hubo doce oradores, cuatro coros, (uno de varoncitos y uno de chicas, otro de mujeres de la Vela Perpetua, y el cuarto de hombres del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús; todos de blanco). Los Vega trajeron el cuerpo de Bruno en la carroza morada con la cortinita gris a fleco. Además de don Pedro, fuimos los doce monaguillos cada uno vestido en casulla negra y blanca bien almidonada. La gente de los otros pueblos del Valle pronto se dio cuenta que algo había en Flora y se dejó venir en troque, en rides, en bicicleta y unos de Klail hasta alquilaron un Greyhound que ya venía repleto de gente procedente de Bascom.

Aparecieron tres dulceros y empezaron a vender raspas para combatir aquel sol que derretía las calles de chapapote. La concurrencia, y yéndose por lo bajo, no era menos de cuatro mil almas. Unos, de seguro, ni sabían a quién enterraban; los más ni conocieron a Cano; lo que pasa es que a la gente le gusta la bulla y no pierde ripo para salir de casa.

Don Pedro tuvo que aguantarse y rezó no menos de trescientos Padrenuestros entre Aves y Salves. Cuando se puso a llorar (de coraje, de histeria, de hambre, vaya usted a saber) la gente, compadecida, rezó por don Pedro. Los oradores repitieron las elegías varias veces y los de la raspa, cada uno, tuvieron que comprar otras tres barras de hielo de cien libras para dar vasto a todo la gente. En casos ni sirope echaban ya. La gente se comía el hielo con o sin agua. De su parte, los coros pronto disiparon su repertorio; para no desperdiciar la oportunidad se echaron el Tantum Ergo que no venía al caso y, menos, el "Ven, Buen Pastor, Redentor Celestial" que se oía sólo en Pascuas. Por fin los cuatro coros se juntaron y entonces la cosa se puso más fina (37-38).

La descripción del entierro de Bruno contiene un tono exagerado que tiende hacia lo surrealista.

Hinojosa también emplea como medio literario la mezcla del inglés y el español y esos giros que provienen del inglés. En vez de escribir "lanta ponchada" usa flat (23); por "gato" (jack en inglés) usa yaque (23). Hablando de los ancianos que participaron en la Revolución mexicana, dice que ahora son

"prisioneros en esas real homes" (121). Un chicano pierde sus tierras por no haber entendido "el papelaje que le encajaron los land developers" (124). En el cuento costumbrista "Un domingo en Klall" Hinojosa describe el partido de béisbol, diversión popular en los barrios chicanos durante los años cuarenta y cincuenta. Arturo, uno de los jugadores, "no entiende muy bien eso de nobody hurt" (125). El equipo es uno de esos que se conoce por good field, no hit (125). Los trabajadores migratorios de Texas que se van al norte, van a trabajar a la cherry (129). Los chicanos toman "café en el coffee lounge" (132). Cuando Burnias lleva un puerco a vender y el inspector lo rechaza, Burnias pregunta, "¿pero por why?" (159). Los chicanos compran donas en vez de rosquillas o buñuelos fritos (170). Uno de los estudiantes chicanos se roba una jersey de football (181).

Miguel Méndez nació en Bisbee, Arizona en 1930. Pasó sus primeros años adolescentes en un ejido en el estado de Sonora, México y estudió seis años en una escuela primaria rural. A los catorce años de edad volvió a los Estados Unidos donde desempeñó varios trabajos. Es albañil y en la actualidad vive en un barrio de Tucson, Arizona.

De los tres autores Méndez cuida más de su estilo y su descripción narrativa. Es la obra suya la cual manifiesta el mayor grado de influencia de la novela mexicana de la Revolución. La técnica es muy semejante a la de Mariano Azuela. Humaniza a la naturaleza y deshumaniza al hombre.

Peregrinos de Axtlán pone en relieve un mundo lleno de hambre y dolor que acompañan siempre a los chicanos que luchan cotidianamente para alimentarse, haciendo el trabajo más duro con los soles agueridos que los mata o los enferma. La trama algo débil trata los sufrimientos de un viejo indio yaqui, Loreto Maldonado, que a los ochenta años trabaja de lavacoches y cardacoches. Méndez usa el monólogo interior para llevarnos a los recuerdos jóvenes del indio que participó en la Revolución mexicana, sus años de bracero en los Estados Unidos, y su vejez en su tierra natal, México, donde muere solo y triste.

Entre los monólogos interiores Méndez intercala escenas que aportan grabados de los problemas sociales que confrontan al chicano. Falta de trabajo, falta de atención médica, falta de enseñanza, viviendas asquerosas y poco higiénicas, trabajo brutal, desamparo de las autoridades, problema de las drogas, alcoholismo, y pérdida de los valores sociales positivos.

Al hablar de la técnica narrativa méndeziana me limitaré a dos elementos: la caracterización de los personajes y el ambiente, y al lenguaje pachuquista que es un elemento nuevo en la prosa chicana.

La caracterización de los personajes es cruda, agria y deshumanizadora. El nombre del personaje principal, Loreto Maldonado, en sí lleva simbólicamente el epíteto de mal aventurado, mal dotado o mal afortunado. En la Revolución había perdido una pierna: "Loreto caminaba con las dificultades que lo hacen las hormigas después de haber sufrido el refregón de una pata sádica."⁴ El hambre continuo de Loreto lo desatinaba y "las tripas le maullaban chillones como gatas violadas en la oscuridad" (18). A Loreto le brincaba el corzaón "como sapo

rocanrolero" (14). Al lavar los autos y al cobrar su dinero extendía "la mano extrañamente abierta como una araña" (19).

A pesar que la caracterización de Loreto Maldonado contiene rasgos deshumanizadores, el autor se preocupa por realzar la nobleza del protagonista, atribuyéndole cualidades de trabajador honrado y orgulloso, de hombre valiente y compasivo. "Para el anciano Loreto Maldonado, vivir significaba luchar a muerte; como si la fluidez de su condición temporal fuera un potro negro, el más bronco, empujando en azotarlo contra pedregales, desde su lomo resbaladizo" (14). Al salir de la iglesia una dama le entrega cinco pesos de dádiva y Loreto contesta: "Yo trabajo, no acepto limosnas de naiden" (15).

Es por los ojos de Loreto que el autor logra mostrar la compasión del personaje, y a la vez sirve de portavoz de los problemas sociales: "Loreto, con su visión amarga de viejo, que conoce los mecanismos de la vida, lo contemplaba todo sin mostrar ningún asombro. Intuía que habitaba una dimensión gris parálenta de heridas gangrenosis. Su mundo era oscuro, vedado a la luz de la alegría." Loreto veía "los seres desgraciados que morían de hambre... los míseros (que) lloraban sumidos en el olvido, y los débiles (que) andaban semidesnudos y sucios" (60-61). Por medio del contraste Méndez le da a Loreto un reflejo de superioridad: "Otros seres que lo rodeaban vivían en su gloria como parásitos, pagando dádivas con payasadas grotescas" (31).

Ejemplos de otros personajes deshumanizados son los siguientes. La mujer rica que le ofrece la limosna a Loreto vestía "sombbrero de los llamados "bacinica," en el brazo izquierdo tantos pulseras ceña como cascabeles que arrastran las víboras muy viejas, su maquillaje era muy espeso, el necesario para planchar los zureos que deja el arado del tiempo" (15). El Cometa, nombre que aporta la raíz del verbo comer, se destaca por su glotonería:

(Era) gordo como gato carnicero, con los ojillos bailarines límites de sendos cachetes inflados; nariz hecha al desgane, apolotada y una frente peluda; acortinada con cabellos que servían de trapecios para que los piojos se trenzaran en reñidos torneos de acrobacia. Usaba pantalones de pechera prendidos de un solo tirante, gruesos de grasa y mugre; pues tenía el tal "Errante" la venia del chicharronero que se decía llamar "Musulini," para servirse de los asientos de la deliciosa fritanga de marrano, que se untaba al fondo del caso (31).

Tenía poca amistad con el calzado, "más que pies servíanle de base dos enormes tortas esponjadas" (31). Al parecer no cuidaba de su pelo, "su greñero no conocía el peine ni retratado" (32).

A la vez que Méndez deshumaniza a sus personajes y los describe con rasgos despreciables, humaniza a la naturaleza. A la ciudad, terruño de los peregrinos, le atribuye Méndez rasgos humanos despreciables. Al describir una caminata del viejo Loreto por la ciudad, escribe: "El viejo Loreto rebanaba la niebla que se había encasquetado de cachucha sobre la cara sucia de la ciudad" (17). En otras ocasiones la ciudad aparece con rasgos femeninos despreciables con los cuales Méndez personifica los vicios nocturnos: "La ciudad va vistiendo sus arcos de alcahueta coquetona con que seduce a los incautos. Como una diosa mitológica, efímera y desvergonzada, se va aprovechando la ciudad de las debilidades humanas para llenar sus últimos rincones" (20). Al describir el problema de las prostitutas,

el alcoholismo y el uso de las drogas vemos la siguiente descripción: "Va la ciudad nocturna sonando amargados; sin verguenza, descalzonada, nalgas de fuera, impúdica; con su vestido de noche adornando con letreros de neón; tronando palmas a los parranderos, como damisela deseocada" (21).

El desierto se humaniza. Méndez lo describe en tonos líricos y exhortadores. En el desierto la tierra es "pálida como una amada muerta" (89). El desierto es "cadáver de mar disecado." La vegetación puede comunicarse con el ser humano: "Arbustos y árboles escuálidos nos dijeron con su aislamiento que luchaban a muerte con el maldito desierto." Los "mesquites esqueléticos... pintaban sombras desnutridas." Los cactus son "como guerrilleros que no tranzas," or "Ejércitos... ariscos que no distinguen adversario" (90).

Ahora hablaremos del lenguaje chicano, el español mezclado con el inglés. Tomás Rivera, Rolando Hinojosa y Miguel Méndez lo utilizan, especialmente en los diálogos, pero es Méndez quien hace mayor uso de este habla. Así como Azuela quien introduce el habla mexicana en la novela mexicana de la Revolución, Méndez introduce el habla del pachuco chicano como medio literario y lo logra bien.

--Orale, mi buen Chucalito, qué milagro que anda usted por aquí.
 --Nel, carnal; pos acá echándole una birria en Mexicles ¿sabes qué, ése? ando brujas ves? aliviánme con un toleco, camita, pa' ver si apañó avión.
 --...vale más borrarse uno de esta pinchi life, ése, pos se lo acaban a uno y ya ni camello le dan...pos aquí camarón, me la paso en Tijuas (26-27).

Aquí tenemos la transposición al español entendido por todos.

- ¿Cómo estás? mi buen Chequito, que milagro que anda usted por aquí.
--No, hermano; pues vine a Méndez a tomarme una cerveza. ¿Sabes qué, hermano? No traigo dinero. Préstame 50 centavos, hermano, para ver si pongo en estado católico.
--...vale más abandonar esta miserable vida, hermano, pues a uno se lo acaban, y ya ni trabajo le dan... Pues aquí hermano, me la paso en Tijuana.

La jerigonza del pachuco es difícil de comprender, pero en la boca de los personajes mendocianos recobra un rasgo realista y revelador del mundo pachuco de antaño. Méndez conoce bien el caló y lo emplea con gran éxito.

En conclusión la sencillez de estilo, el uso de la técnica descriptiva de personajes y ambiente, la preocupación por problemas sociales, la innovación y uso del inglés y el español como medio literario, y la falta de trama y temas unificadores demuestran que Tomás Rivera, Rolando Hinojosa y Miguel Méndez han seguido las huellas de la novela mexicana de los años 1951 al 1940, y por eso muy justamente se les considera epígonos de la novela mexicana de la Revolución.

NOTAS

¹Beryl J. M. McManus, "La técnica del nuevo realismo en la novela mexicana de la Revolución," en Memoria del Cuarto Congreso del Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana (La Habana, 1951), 318.

²Tomás Rivera, Y no se lo tragó la tierra (Berkeley: Quinto Sol, 1970), 22. Todas las citas subsiguientes llevarán sólo en número de la página.

³Rolando R. Hinojosa-S, Estampas del Valle y otras obras (Berkeley: Quinto Sol, 1973), 15. Otras citas de esta obra sólo llevarán el número de la página.

⁴Miguel Méndez M., Peregrinos de Aztlán (Berkeley: Editorial Peregrinos, 1974), 14. Otras citas de esta obra sólo llevarán el número de la página.

CHICANO FOLKLORE:
RAZA HUMOR IN TEXAS

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The folk literature of Chicanos in the Southwest has been of interest to the folklorist, Anglo and Chicano alike, for many years, beginning in the early twentieth century. My own study of the Chicano jest and anecdote began in earnest in 1969, at which time I began to collect jokes for analysis in another study.¹ Since that time, I have examined approximately two thousand jokes, on which I base most of my observations on Raza humor in Texas.

The jest or joke as discussed here is considered as an integral part of the longer standard folktale, and should be distinguished at the outset from certain connotations of the term "joke" in accepted Anglo usage, such as pranks (practical jokes), riddling questions (e.g., moron jokes) and "one-line" jokes. Whereas anything that evokes laughter might be considered a "joke" in Anglo culture, "chiste" in Chicano culture usually refers specifically to a short prose narrative that is humorous.

Detailed analysis of jokes as found among Chicanos in Texas has revealed a number of preferred themes, although it must be pointed out that most universal themes are also extant in the tradition. Among preferred themes are jokes of cleverness, numskull jokes, jokes about lies and exaggerations, blason populaire (slurs) and other miscellaneous themes.² Some of these themes have been so prevalent that they occur in cycles, as in the case of jokes of cleverness, which have given rise to characters such as the Perico (parrot), Pepito and Pedro de Urdemales, a well-known figure in Spanish American joke tradition. It is

interesting that there is, to my knowledge, no similar numskull character with the exception of the Stupid American cycle in Chicano tradition.³

The jokes that are the most popular among Chicanos in Texas are jokes which are based on misunderstandings of language. Ordinarily, jokes involving such misunderstandings are found even where there is only one language and they find expression in the joke traditions of all peoples, although usually some element must be added, such as deaf characters, for verosimilitude. But the bilingual nature of Chicano culture has undoubtedly contributed to the proliferation of jokes in which the punchline is based on the fact that someone is ignorant of either Spanish or English and is usually made to look ludicrous as a result of his ignorance. A classic example is the joke about the American tourist in Mexico who insists on buying a burro from a Mexican and later finds that it is blind. But he had been warned by the Mexican that "the burro, he don't look too good." In another joke, an American lady insists on obtaining lodging at a man's house even though it means sleeping in the same room with a son who is retarded and "garrapatas" (ticks). The next morning she complains that, "¡Su hijo no garrapatas, su hijo garrapatas, garrachiches, garráburro, garratodo!"

A related feature of this type of joke is, of course, the ethnic slur since it is as a representative of a particular group that the character's ignorance becomes an attendant factor in the joke. It is an especially significant factor when one considers that there are, on the other hand, jokes in which the Spanish-speaker is similarly discomfited because of his ignorance of English. A short joke tells

of a Mexican whose car has broken down and is attempting to fix it when an Anglo comes along and greets him, "Hello!" The Mexican, by now frustrated, yells back, "¡No! ¡aló ni qué una chingada!" One that I heard very recently is about a Mexican who inserted fifteen cents in a soft-drink machine (symbolically the Anglo) but was ten cents short. When the sign lit up, "DIME" he looked around and then whispered at the machine, "¡Dame una Coke!"

In these two classes of jokes based on misunderstandings of language, there is a significant factor with regard to the socio-cultural context of the Chicano that is worth noting. It has already been mentioned that the Anglo has been depicted as a numskull in Chicano tradition. Similarly, Professor Paredes observed a few years ago that jokes in which the Mexican is ridiculed reflect the attainment of a universal level in Mexican humor which indicates that the Mexican is able to laugh at himself.⁴ And an early text from the Midwest suggests that the type was appreciated at the time, which leads Kanellos to reiterate the view that the Mexican is laughing at himself, much as other immigrant groups laugh at their own deficiencies in this country.⁵ My own feeling, however, is that while this may be true to an extent now, there is evidence which indicates that at this time jokes that depict the Spanish-speaker as the butt of the joke represent obvious ethnic slurs directed against the Mexican from Mexico.

A detailed analysis of numerous jokes reveals a marked awareness on the part of Chicanos of differences between Mexicans and Chicanos, that Chicanos consciously make such distinctions and that they consider Mexicans to be inferior

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in many ways. One finds, for example, that there are clear and conscious references to the Spanish-speaker in the jokes as a "mexicano del otro lao," or a "mojao." Many times it is pointed out by the narrator that the setting is Mexico, where presumably no one understands English and such misunderstandings could occur. Finally, a number of stereotyped images of Mexico and Mexicans--unhygienic conditions, for example--are interspersed throughout narratives dealing with "mexicanos" and Mexico, all of which serves to illustrate the contempt which Chicanos many times feel toward the Mother Country and Mexicans. In sum, Chicanos do not identify with the immigrants and are therefore not laughing at themselves in these particular jokes. Consequently, it would be valid to classify certain jokes as ethnic slurs directed against Mexicans rather than as self-critical humor, just as it would be accurate to consider as slurs those jokes in which Anglos are depicted as linguistically inept.

Nonetheless, I have chosen to discuss them as examples of the Chicano's propensity for verbal play, in this instance specifically in the joke, rather than merely as a vehicle for the expression of animosity toward Anglos or Mexicans, because I believe that this the principal concern among the Chicanos when they relate these jokes. There are, furthermore, jokes which actually reflect the Chicano's awareness of dialectal differences between the Chicano and the Mexican. One joke which illustrates this awareness is about two Chicanos--a tall one and a short one--who always went to Reynosa together. One day the tall one was ill and could not go so the short one went alone. While in Reynosa he ran a stop sign and

when the policeman stopped him and asked him, in the informal manner of Mexican policemen, "¿Qué pasó con el ALTO?" he replied, "Está enfermo, no pudo venir ora."

In short, it is essential to realize that the esoteric-exoteric factor in these jokes involves three groups, Anglos, Chicanos and Mexicans and that the Chicano's perception of these exchanges is influenced by their own experience and is therefore different from the perception of say Mexicans.⁶ I believe, further, that it is possible that Mexicans may have their own jokes about Chicanos. When I unwittingly told a joke about Mexicans to a Mexican he attempted to retaliate by telling me one about a Chicano who went to a restaurant in Mexico City and asked for "pan mexicano."

Although many jokes are of a cross-cultural nature and these are the most popular, it must be understood that all jokes based on misunderstandings of language are not of this type, but that it is a matter of preference dictated by circumstances. Many are simply jokes in which the humor is based on double entendre, malapropisms, solecisms, etc., all in Spanish, and which, incidentally, often result in jokes that would be technically obscene. For instance, one of the most popular jokes is about the lady whose "comadre" does not believe that ducks lay eggs, so she yells at her husband, who is out feeding the ducks, ¡"Viejo, levanta la pata y enséñale los huevos a la comadre!" In another joke, a young fool is supposed to inform his mother that his aunt has not visited them because, "Se le trastocó el periodo." Instead, he reports that, "Se le trasrrosquió el pedorro." Many times, of course, the man in the joke takes advantage of the situation to violate the woman symbolically. For example, when a gentleman is offered lodging for the night

by a lady and her daughters even though it is crowded and they will have to sleep, "unos arriba de otros," he takes advantage by inquiring, "Buena, ¿arriba de quién voy a dormir yo?" There is a similar case of a veiled aggression in the joke about the "comadre" who is feeding her "compadre" and uses so much chili that his nose starts to run. When she asks, "¿Es por el chile, compadre?" he answers, "No, por las narices, comadre." But the ladies get their opportunity to come out on top many times. In one such case, a nice and proper young lady was dancing with an uncooth, insolent local yokel whom she could not befriend. Waiting for the opportune moment to express her disgust, she asked what it was that rubbed against her every time they went around, to which he answered, "Es la pistola," which, of course, has more than one meaning. But the lady won the battle of words when she told him, "¿Por qué no sale pa fuera y se la mete atrás?" These jokes certainly provide added examples of the role of verbal skill in Chicano culture as much as they are the narrative counterparts of the "albur" or verbal contest prevalent among males in both Mexican and Chicano cultures.⁷

One curious aspect of the joke among Chicanos is that while most universal themes can be found, the representation of "Shaggy Dog" stories, which are so popular in Anglo tradition,⁸ is negligible. Even though the turn of phrase, double entendre, etc., which constitute an important part of the Shaggy Dog story are present there are few jokes in which the object is to frustrate the listener, which is an equally important feature of the type.⁹ The only exception that has come to my attention is a type of joke discussed by Porches in his article on jokes and folk medicine,¹⁰

although the noted Chilean author, Rolando Hinojosa, told me a joke a few years ago that might be considered a Shaggy Dog story. In that joke, a lady who was trying shoes in a store passed gas and sneaked out while the salesman was looking for another pair. After walking a few blocks, she discovered, to her chagrin, that she had left her umbrella in the store. She hesitated a while but finally worked up the courage to return for her umbrella, hoping that the boy had forgotten the incident. She walked in the store and sheepishly asked him, "¿No dejó aquí mi pedito?" Yet, even in this instance, the joke was told in a manner intended not to mock the listener but the character in the joke.

In addition to the humorous possibilities to be found in the joke, particularly those in which there is some play on words, the "picardía chicana" can also be detected in other forms which Dunbar has labelled minor genres of folklore.¹¹ The form that I have been collecting and studying for a number of years is that which may be called loosely the idiom. In many idiomatic phrases there is a wry, ironic, witty humor displayed which manifests itself in these flashes of metaphorical expression. Following are some examples of remarks that are common in South Texas:

When a person's trousers are too short:

"Ese anda muy highwaters," or "True highwaters," in Kingsville:
 "¿Llovio mucho en Robstown (Robstown)?"

When a person's clothes are too large:

"¿Estaba muy grande el difunto?"

When someone's trousers get stuck between the buttocks:

"Anda mortificado," "True el pope que ya metido," or one may simply look at the person.

When someone uses profanity:

"¿Con esa boca comes?"

When someone butts into a conversation:

"Cuando diga borcolina (sic), or vacu, sales por debajo de la cama."

When someone is bragging:

"A ese le van a dar quebrada--de hocico."

When someone is always late:

"Estás como los buses mexicanos--que siempre llegan tarde."

When someone says or does something boorish, dumb, foolish:

"¡México, ven por tu gente!"

When someone attempts to apologize:

"Vergüenza es rolar--y que te pesquen--la segunda vez."

When someone is taking his leave:

"No te vayas--deteniendo."

The most recent such remark that I heard, said to a student who was importuning a butcher with whom he was working in, "El hijo te lo doy el diez de mayo." When the student could not figure out the meaning and asked what he meant by "el diez de mayo," the butcher explained, "Es el día de las madres." Indirectly, he was "mentándole la madre;" there is also another idiom, "Darle en la madre" (to beat the hell out of someone), which would be an appropriate interpretation. Again, verbal wit as well as aggression are present in these expressions.

In conclusion, it should be clear that Raza humor is characterized not only by the presence of universal themes in joke tradition, but also by a marked preference for humor based on verbal skill and wit, as illustrated by the abundance of certain types of jokes and idioms which are current among Chicanos.

And, finally, an important consideration at this point would seem to be the part that humor has played in contemporary Chicano literature, given the nature of Chicano humor at the popular level as well as the fact that literature should reflect all aspects of the culture of a people. Granting that circumstances have called for protest literature, it is nonetheless to be regretted that the humor which is such a vital part of our tradition has not been cultivated to any extent in the literary production except in a few cases.

Footnotes

¹José R. Reyna, "Mexican American Prose Narrative in Texas: The Jest and Anecdote," Ph. D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1973.

²The categories used here are based on types established in Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, The Types of the Folktale (Helsinki, 1961).

³For a discussion of this cycle see Américo Paredes, "The Anglo American in Mexican Folklore," In New Voices in Literature, Purdue University Studies (1966), pp. 118-120.

⁴Paredes, "The Anglo," pp. 125-126.

⁵Nicólas Kanellos, "Bromeando," Revista Chicano-Riqueña, año uno, número uno (1973), p. 5. For early examples from New Mexico see Aurelio M. Espinosa, "New Mexican Folk-lore," VIII. Short Folk-Tales and Anecdotes, Journal of American Folklore, XXVII (1914), 142-147, nos. 35-37

⁶William Hughes Jansen, "The Esoteric-Exoteric Factor in Folklore," Fabula: Journal of Folklore Studies, II (1959), 205-211.

⁷Paredes, "The Anglo," pp. 120-123.

⁸Jan H. Brunvand, "A Classification for Shaggy Dog Stories," Journal of American Folklore, LXXVI (1963), 42-68.

⁹Brunvand, "Shaggy Dog," p. 44.

¹⁰Américo Paredes, "Folk Medicine and the Intercultural Jest," In Introduction to Chicano Studies, ed. Livie Isauro Duran and H. Russell Bernard (New York, 1973), pp. 261-275. See also Américo Paredes, "Tag! You're it!," Journal of American Folklore, LXXIII (1960), 157.

¹¹Alan Dundes, "Some Minor Genres of American Folklore," Southern Folklore Quarterly, XXXI (1967), 20-36.

SATIRE: TECHNIQUES AND DEVICES IN LUIS VALDEZ'

"LAS DOS CARAS DEL PATRONCITO"

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Satire is difficult to define. Most critics and writers disagree on a precise definition but all concur that in substance it is a form of criticism which may be dealt with directly or indirectly. Satire, to be sure, brings to light what is wrong with someone or something, not what is good or moral, but it also engenders entertainment. To be more effective in his attacks the writer exaggerates and distorts objectionable qualities but he does so in a humorous fashion. Consequently, his familiarity with the environment and with his subjects is extremely important or he is destined to fail in his approach. For that reason he deals with specific individuals, in particular situations, under certain conditions, until he is well acquainted with their imperfections--imperfection leads to criticism.

Hypocrisy is one of the most popular sources of satire for a writer. It gives him the opportunity to be critical of society, its institutions, or the individuals who comprise them. He thrives on exposing to the public, to the reader, the morally bad, evil and imperfect. By revealing unacceptable qualities, he degrades his victim, and makes him look inferior and one for whom the reader or audience can feel contempt. Therefore, we are entertained because of the pleasure in seeing someone who is of questionable character degraded. In satire the process of unmasking¹ the inadequacies of an individual may be accomplished in various ways.

This is precisely the situation with the patrón or boss in "Las Dos Caras del Patroncito." In essence this one act play is a satirical indictment against hypocrisy.

The purpose of this study, then, is to examine the techniques and devices that Luis Valdez employs in exposing the patrón's hypocrisy in his relationship with the farmworker. An in-depth study of "Las Dos Caras del Patroncito" will help the reader to understand the use of satire in other Chicano literature.

El Teatro Campesino, founded by Luis Valdez, is a theater of social protest born as a result of the farmworker's plight in California. For years the vineyards have been a mecca for human injustices, and recently a literary inspiration for the Chicano writer. An example of both is "Las Dos Caras del Patroncito." The patroncito, powerful and wealthy, is surrounded by material possessions accumulated at the sacrifice of the migrant worker.

Symbols: Man versus Animal

The play deals with three principal characters : Charlie, the boss's paid henchman, the farmworker or strike breaker (esquirol) and the owner himself. To all of them Luis Valdez ascribes animal characteristics: Charlie resembles an ape and represents force; the farm hand, in a typical master-servant relationship, because of his submissiveness, is occasionally portrayed as a dog. As for the patrón who fashions a grotesque, yellow (an allusion to the California sun and perhaps to greed) pig mask, he is depicted as a pig.

The word "pig" has several implications, most of which are colloquial in nature, but perfect for describing the real boss in terms of his niggardliness. In English pig may denote "hog"; that is, someone who is selfish and greedy. In Spanish marrano often has a similar meaning and may apply to a person who, like

the patrón, "hogs" everything. In a dialogue with the migrant worker it becomes clear that the patrón is conscious of his egotism:

Patroncito. Exactly. You got it good! Now look at me: they say I'm greedy, that I'm rich. Well, let me tell you, boy, I got problems. No free housing for me, Pancho. I gotta pay for what I got...²

The slightest hint of human abuse arouses his anger and causes him to behave in a reactionary manner:

Patroncito. Those commie bastards (huelguistas) say I don't know what hard work is, that I exploit my workers. (p. 50).

The patrón is guilty of complicity in his greedy and exploitative practices. In that respect he is a pig, a hog, or a marrano interested only in reaping profits and in building up his personal fortune, and disinterested in the oppression, despair and misery that pervade the farmworker's life. The boss looks upon him as a creature unworthy of special consideration or pity and refutes all allegations of being egotistical. But the best clue that he is a hypocrite is reflected in the title of the play. It clearly indicates the boss's duplicity: he is two-faced (con dos caras).

While the poet utilizes symbols in lieu of objects, the satirist uses them as devices to distort whatever he attacks. By pretending that he is describing animals, and not men, satire is leveled indirectly.³ To portray human beings with animal characteristics is to bend and distort those individuals who purport to be morally good or perfect. That is exactly what Luis Valdez accomplishes in his portrayal of the patrón. Hence the process of social satire becomes suspenseful and its techniques more effective.

Ignorance and Stupidity

Another device employed to degrade a victim is to make him look stupid or ignorant by comparing him to a person of lesser importance. Frequently it is difficult for an author to have a character appear outright like a dolt or simpleton without using scurrilous terminology. But to resort to vitriolic language is precarious because the satirist runs the risk of inflicting self-defeat. Neither the reader nor the audience appreciates disparaging remarks because they are generally offensive and devoid of humor and consequently not entertaining. The writers must be tactful and subtle to avoid pitfalls. That is the reason he chooses an indirect approach to ridicule his subject. In that respect the individual in question is likely to be portrayed as inferior.

By comparison the patrón is depicted as being culturally inferior to the farmworker. We know that the boss is in reality not dumb or stupid, that he is in effect astute and shrewd, which accounts for his success. Nevertheless, Luis Valdez portrays him as linguistically deficient: he speaks very little Spanish, his English is colloquial and dialectical at best, whereas the laborer, despite his socio-economic background, is bilingual. The patrón pretends to know very little Spanish and uses only a smattering of it. Reminding the farmworker of the comfortable living quarters he is furnished merely elicits a facetious remark:

Farmworker. *Si señor, ayer se cayó la puerta.* (p. 49).

The boss perturbed by such unexpected honesty,⁴ feigns that he does not comprehend what he hears:

Patroncito. What was that? ENGLISH. (p. 49).

While the boss pretends not to understand the laborer's unpleasant truths, if the latter speaks out against César Chávez and the huelga, then the patrón's comprehension of Spanish is excellent. Further evidence of his duplicity is witnessed in the following dialogue:

Patroncito. (To Farmworker)... I got him (Charlie) around to keep an eye on them huelguistas. You ever heard of them, son? Ever heard of Huelga? Or César Chávez?

Farmworker. Oh sí, patrón!

Patroncito. What?

Farmworker. Oh no, señor! Es comunista! Y la huelga es puro pedo.

Bola de colorados, arrastrados, huevones! No trabajan porque no quieren!

Patroncito. That's right, son Sic'em Sic'em, boy! (p. 48).

The art of comparison and juxtaposition is an approach that yields pleasure. Either one is more acceptable to the reader and/or audience than a scurrilous attack and each is equally effective in revealing the patrón's character. Moreover, what one derives from the comparative technique in this case is that, despite the pervasive and oppressive environment of the farmworker, his intellectual acumen never deteriorates.

Racial Discrimination

Racial hypocrisy is perhaps the outstanding attribute of the patrón. His relationship with the farmworker is superficial at best. The latter, trucked from Mexico, is a total stranger to the vineyards. Immediately he plunges into anonymity. Like the rest of his compatriots, he tends to lose his personal identity. He is no longer Pedro; he is now "boy," pancho or Juan, all of which have prejudicial overtones and are symptomatic of the boss's racial attitudes. The patrón from the outset asserts and makes his position of authority clear. His tactics are forceful, intimidating and racial:

Patroncito. What, boy? You don't have to be scared of me!... (p. 47).

"Boy" is a word the plantation owner uses repeatedly. It has derogatory implications, just as it does to many blacks. Accordingly, it undermines and demeans the farmworker's pride and reinforces his anonymity in a world of neglect and uncertainty.

Despite the harsh treatment suffered by the farmworker, the boss boasts of admiration for the Mexican people. Phrases like "I love my Mexicans" or "Yes siree, I sure love my Mexicans, boy!" are common inanities in his repertoire. An example of his racial ambivalence is magnified after the farmworker in a gesture of brotherly love puts his arm around him only to be told:

Patroncito. I love 'em (Mexicans) about ten feet away from me, boy. (pp. 47-48).

The fact that his statements frequently include and/or terminate with boy, reaffirms further his racism.

Another pejorative word prominent in the patrón's vocabulary is "pancho."

Pancho is often more offensive than boy; in the United States it may be subtle way of expressing dislike for a Spanish surnamed person who is presumed to be Mexican or of Mexican extraction; or it may suggest that he is meek, inferior, indolent and subject to domination. The owner, notorious for harassing the migrant worker, is equally persistent in proclaiming his esteem for him, particularly if the farmworker expresses opposition against the strikers, at which time the boss's racial hypocrisy becomes more persuasive:

Patroncito: — Att'a baby!—Your're OK, Pancho. (48).

Having gotten acquainted with the farmworker, the patrón pretends to know him but mistakenly calls him Juan, only to be reminded that his real name is Pedro, a name the boss never uses. The use of Juan demonstrates that to him all Mexicans are identical. To react in this fashion suggests that many people like the patrón have a stereotypic conception as to who and what constitutes a Mexican. Such attitudes are usually not only equivocal but prejudicial and negative in nature.

There is ample evidence that attests to this kind of attitude with regard to the plantation owner in "Las Dos Caras del Patroncito." His conception of a Mexican is that he is a "greaser" or "grease ball." The image emanates, in part, from the lard or manteca that Mexican families traditionally used for cooking or frying in the Southwest and other parts of the United States because it was more economical. Sometimes lard came from chicharrones after a hog was butchered at a family affair. Consequently, if the patrón admonishes the farm hand to take his hands off his Lincoln Continental, ("GIT YOUR GREASY HANDS OFF IT!") his

command smacks of stereotypic racism.

What makes the patrón's hypocrisy more convincing and his feelings toward the Mexican migrant worker a farce is his exaggerated admiration for the Mexican people. Hypocrisy reaches a climax in a confession to the farmworker:

Patroncito. I'm going to let you in on a little secret. Sometimes I sit up there in my office and think to myself: I wish I was a Mexican. (p. 50).

It is evident that by distorting the true feelings of the land owner, Luis Valdez makes a mockery of him, especially when the farmworker, astounded at what his patrón has just said retorts, "You?" Still, the patrón is shocked to learn that he indeed does resemble the farmworker:

Farmworker. Patrón, you look like me:

Patroncito. You mean ... I ... look like a Mexican?

Farmworker. Sí, señor! (p. 51).

Role-Exchange

The role-exchange involves a situation in which one character assumes the role of another and a technique that resembles to an extent the mask-persona.⁵ The effectiveness of such an approach may be measured, in part, in the freedom that it allows the artist or writer for delivering his criticism. The switch in roles, needless to say, evokes humor as well. For our purpose the role-exchange also represents the final step in the over-all unmasking process.

Before dealing with the exchange in roles concept, so that the evolution of the unmasking process is clearer, let us sum up the three major episodes of "Las Dos Caras del Patroncito": (1) the farmworker's introduction to the patrón and to the vineyards (2) the farmworker's plight versus the boss's wealth (3) the farmworker and the patrón exchange roles.

The exchange results in a mix-up of identities: Charlie, the bodyguard, is unaware of the switch which has ensued. That being the case, he unknowingly defends the farmworker and pushes the real patrón around. Not only does he act as his bodyguard but he also reflects the same prejudices and ruthlessness as the patrón. In that respect Charlie is the patrón's alter-ego.

In the confusion the farmworker usurps the power of the patrón. The latter is no longer the patrón; he is now the patroncito whose power has been reduced to the point of absurdity (reductio ad absurdum)⁶ as he is carried off the stage innocently by Charlie who fails to recognize that the voice beckoning for help is that of his boss:

Patroncito. (...) Charlie! Stop it! Somebody help me! Help! Where's those damn union organizers? Where's César Chávez? Help! Huelga! HUELGAaaaaaa! (p. 53).

The switching of roles is not only the final episode revealing the boss's character but, more importantly, it is a compendium of the patrón's ruthlessness,

racism, greed and stupidity that are brought to light all at once. In the exchange the patrón is unable to endure and act out the role of the farmworker and voluntarily admits to being a purveyor of human injustices and implicitly confesses his hypocrisy:

Patroncito. Oh no, this is too much. You've gone too far, boy. I think you better gimme back my things. (He takes off farmworker sign & hat, throws down shears, and tells the audience) You know that damn César Chávez is right? You can't do this work for less than two dollars an hour. No, boy, I think we've played enough. Give me back-- (p. 53).

NOTES

¹Leonard Feinberg, Introduction to Satire (Iowa: The Iowa State University Press, 1967), p.212.

²Luis Valdez, "Las Dos Caras del Patroncito," in Literatura Chicana: texto y contexto, ed. by Antonia Cantañeda Shular, Tomás Ybarre-Frausto, and Joseph Sommers (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1972), p. 49. Henceforth all references to "Las Dos Caras del Patroncito" in this study will be from the above edition.

³Feinberg, pp. 198-199.

⁴Ibid., pp. 144-150.

Unexpected honesty is an honest statement usually not anticipated by the reader of audience which under certain conditions results amusing and humorous. The farmworker is an excellent example of one who surprises us with unexpected honesty.

⁵Ibid., p. 194.

The mask-persona is where a person for any number of reasons pretends to be another.

⁶Ibid., p. 112.

Reductio ad absurdum in satire is exaggeration carried to an extreme. The idea that the farmworker wrests total power from the patrón is grossly exaggerated. Accordingly, the boss is completely trampled over and humiliated and made to look ridiculous in the eyes of the public.

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